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AUTHOR Reisner, Elizabeth; And Others

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the national network of Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), which provides technical assistance in evaluation and program improvement to state and local educational agencies responsible for implementing programs under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). The U.S. Department of Education currently operates four TACs, which each provide assistance in a specified region of the country. The TACs are funded at an overall level of $3.6 million a year, down from a high of $8.5 million in 1980-81. The study found that, despite variations across TACs, they have generally selected technical assistance strategies that are consistent with their program goals, with some major exceptions. Other findings indicate that state and local education agencies have significant needs for the assistance provided by TACs. In general, these TACs were found to achieve satisfactory results in their assistance with evaluation and program improvement; the most important result was the interest and enthusiasm they generated among local Chapter 1 personnel. However, support for TACs by the Department of Education was found to be inadequate. Accordingly, the report concludes with a recommendation that the Department of Education redirect the TAC mission toward increasing the capacity of state education agencies to promote and implement Chapter 1 improvement. References are included. (TE)

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EVALUATION OF THE ECIA CHAPTER 1 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS (TACs)

Elizabeth R. Reisner
Brenda J. Turnbull
Jane L. David

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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POLICY STUDIES ASSOCIATES, INC.
1718 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N. W. • SUITE 700 • WASHINGTON, D. C. 20009 • (202) 939-9780

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Elizabeth R. Reisner
Brenda J. Turnbull
Jane L. David

June 1988

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Executive Summary

This study evaluated the national network of Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), which provides technical assistance in evaluation and program improvement to state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) responsible for implementing programs under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). The U.S. Department of Education (ED) currently operates four TACs, which each provide assistance in a specified region of the country. The TACs are funded at an overall level of $3.6 million a year, down from a high of $8.5 million in 1980-81.

TAC Services and Operations

The TACs were established in 1976 to assist SEAs and LEAs in implementing the project evaluation requirements of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. They continue to provide the following types of assistance in evaluating compensatory education programs:

- Much of the TACs' current assistance in evaluation consists of answering questions on testing, including questions on aligning tests and curriculum, test selection, scoring, and report preparation.
- In response to growing demand, TACs provide in-depth assistance in implementing the Chapter 1 sustained effects requirements, developing microcomputer data bases, and interpreting evaluation data.
- As states increase their student assessment activities, TACs are being asked to advise and assist in coordinating Chapter 1 testing activities with state assessment programs.

TACs also provide wide-ranging assistance in improving the quality and effectiveness of Chapter 1 instructional services, as follows:

- Program improvement services typically include assistance with needs assessment (using locally developed evaluation data) and with designing and implementing improvement plans.

- TAC assistance in program improvement includes help with interpreting data, rethinking curriculum, planning change, conducting staff development, involving parents, coordinating with and influencing the regular instructional program, and developing strategies for continuing self-assessment.

- Assistance in these areas generally culminates in a locally generated Chapter 1 improvement plan that includes steps aimed at developing project and school characteristics associated with instructional effectiveness.

- TACs generally deliver these services through workshop series or direct consultations in LEAs.

We found that, despite variations across TACs, they have generally selected technical assistance strategies that are consistent with their program goals. Moreover, TACs' administrative frameworks facilitate the delivery of the intended services. Our analysis indicates that the costs of TAC services are generally reasonable.

The major exceptions to this picture of a coherent, efficient system of technical assistance are:

- TACs continue to provide some services (e.g., explaining Chapter 1 evaluation requirements, helping prepare SEA reports) that SEAs should be able to handle on their own.

- TAC assistance in program improvement does not consistently involve SEAs in ways that help them improve their own capabilities.

- The availability of TAC assistance in program improvement is creating demands for services that may exceed the current system's capacity to fulfill.

- Large states are not receiving an equitable share of TAC service, due to the high floor of service necessary for each state and the low aggregate level of service.

- TAC offices have relatively little contact with each other and thus miss opportunities to share materials and approaches.

- TAC staff receive little or no training in the provision of technical assistance.

The Users of TAC Assistance

Current data on SEA and LEA staff resources for implementing Chapter 1 indicate significant levels of need for assistance in evaluating and improving program services. These needs are particularly serious in light of the program's regulatory tradition, in which substantial amounts of staff time and attention go to maintaining compliance with legal requirements. Under these conditions, the expertise and availability of the TACs cannot help but make a welcome contribution.

Looking at the match between what TACs offer and what SEAs and districts want, we identified three different roles that TACs fulfill:

- TAC staff act as a reference service for virtually all their state and local clients. This is their least demanding role in terms of time and skills, but it meets an important need for information.
- TACs serve as extensions of SEA staff. Because the overall numbers of SEA staff who specialize in Chapter 1 evaluation or program content are so low (averaging about half a full-time equivalent staff member in each area per state), skilled help from the TACs makes a real difference.
- TACs act as capacity builders when they and local districts commit reasonable amounts of time to an intervention such as a workshop series. In addition to the skills they teach, the TACs help build Chapter 1 instructional capacity simply by serving as advocates for improvement.

The Effects of TAC Services

Despite differences across TACs, we found that in general they are achieving results commensurate with their efforts in evaluation and program improvement assistance. The most important of their results may be the interest and enthusiasm they generate among local Chapter 1 personnel. Interactions with TACs help local staff see new possibilities in the instructional services they provide and the results that their students are capable of achieving. In addition, the following effects are also evident:

- State and local users are satisfied with TAC services.
- TAC assistance has resulted in the successful adoption and implementation of Chapter 1's evaluation and reporting system.
- The TACs have helped states improve the quality of their Chapter 1 data.
- They have helped familiarize LEAs with research findings on effective schools and classrooms.
- Because program improvement assistance draws direct connections between evaluation results and Chapter 1 programs, TAC help in this area has increased local interest in evaluation issues.
- TAC assistance in program improvement has also prompted greater coordination between Chapter 1 and regular instruction.
- Finally, the TACs have helped communicate ED priorities in program improvement and evaluation.

Given the very large number of Chapter 1 LEAs and the small size of the TAC program, the positive effects of TAC services will be limited to only a few local recipients unless SEAs can be enlisted to participate more meaningfully in program improvement assistance. SEA Chapter 1 offices are the logical entities for this work because they know the Chapter 1 program and the characteristics of the projects in their states. What they sometimes lack is expertise in program improvement and technical assistance. To help them acquire that expertise, they need to learn from the TACs and the TACs need to encourage them to learn.

The TACs and ED

Staff availability and contracting procedures constrain ED's administration of the TACs in ways that are not easily changed. Even so, in anticipating shifts in the demands made on the TAC program, we found that three results of the current relationship between ED and the TACs are particularly important. First, current TAC requirements and incentives place low priority on the development of expertise or materials specially

tailored to the needs of TAC users. Second, few incentives or opportunities exist to encourage information-sharing and collaboration across TACs. Third, current federal monitoring procedures do not encourage TACs to engage in the kinds of in-depth consultation and sustained involvement with local staff that are most likely to produce lasting improvement in Chapter 1 services.

Alternatives for Change in the TAC Program

In designing specifications for the next TACs, we suggest that ED redirect the TAC mission towards increasing SEAs' capacity to promote and implement Chapter 1 improvement. This role would not preclude current TAC services, but it would cause TACs and SEAs to place more emphasis on TAC efforts to build SEA capacity as assistance providers and advocates for improvement. To supplement this shift, we suggest the following additional alternatives for change in the TAC program:

Possible Changes in the Structure of the TAC Program

- Assign special areas of expertise and responsibility to some TACs (e.g., parent involvement, education of migrant students).
- Establish minimum levels of effort for TAC offices.

Possible Changes in the General Responsibilities of the TACs

- Require TACs to evaluate their technical assistance services and to use evaluation data to improve their service capacities.
- Increase TAC capacity to assist in developing student- and school-level data bases.
- Increase TAC capacity to assist in coordinating Chapter 1 evaluation and program improvement with state testing and improvement initiatives.
- Conduct a series of TAC seminars on technical assistance issues.
- Publish a national newsletter on Chapter 1 program improvement and evaluation.

Possible Changes in ED Administration of the TACs

- Implement new reporting requirements.
- Increase feedback to TACs on their performance.
- Allow TACs greater latitude in staffing.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge and thank those who assisted in this study. In particular, the directors of the TAC headquarters and field offices were unfailingly helpful and cooperative. The state and local Chapter 1 directors and staff members whom we interviewed by telephone were also generous with their time and insights. In addition, we wish to thank personnel of the Education Department's Planning and Evaluation Service, especially its director Alan Ginsburg, along with Keith Baker, James English, Howard Essl, Valena Plisko, and Nina Winkler.

The study team included a number of individuals. Richard N. Apling, Jane L. David, Ellen L. Marks, and Elizabeth R. Reisner visited and described the operations of the four TACs. Meena Balasubramaniam, Joanne Bogart, Ms. Marks, Ms. Reisner, and Brenda J. Turnbull conducted telephone interviews with state and local users of TAC services. Ms. Marks reviewed the draft report and provided suggestions for its improvement.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that, despite the contributions of others, the authors alone are responsible for the conclusions expressed here and for any errors of fact or interpretation.

Table of Contents

		Page
Executive Summary		i
Acknowledgments		vii
1.	Introduction	1
	Origin and Development of the TAC Program of Technical Assistance	1
	Purposes and Methods of This Evaluation	4
2.	TAC Services and Operations	7
	TAC Services to SEAs and LEAs	7
	Allocation of TAC Services	24
	TAC Administration	27
	Conclusion	34
3.	The Users of TAC Assistance	35
	Users at the State Level	35
	Users at the Local Level	42
	Using Technical Assistance	47
	Conclusion	48
4.	Effects of TAC Services	51
	Users' Satisfaction with the TACs	51
	Effects of the TACs' Assistance in Evaluation	52
	Effects of the TACs' Assistance in Program Improvement	53
	Other Effects of TAC Assistance	57
	Conclusion	58

Table of Contents (continued)

		Page
5.	The TACs and ED	59
	Impact of the Larger Chapter 1 Program on the TACs	59
	Impact of the Procedures Used to Administer the TACs	64
	The Special Circumstances Posed for the TACs by Chapter 1's State-Operated Programs	70
	Results of ED's Administrative Direction of the TACs	71
6.	Alternatives for Change in the TAC Program	73
	Possible Changes in the Structure of the TAC Program	73
	Possible Changes in the General Responsibilities of the TACs	75
	Possible Changes in ED Administration of the TACs	79
References		81

List of Tables and Figures

		Page
Figure 1	TAC Regions	3
Table 1	Time Spent by the Four TACs on Each Major TAC Activity	33
Table 2	Number of SEA Staff Under Title I and Chapter 1	36
Table 3	ED Spending on Compensatory Education and the TACs, 1976-77 through 1987-88	61

1. Introduction

For the past twelve years, a national network of Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) has provided assistance in evaluation and program improvement to agencies responsible for administering federal compensatory education programs. Originally focused on assisting the implementation of required evaluation procedures, the mission of the TACs has changed to include assistance in improving the instructional programs supported by federal compensatory funds. As the U.S. Department of Education (ED) plans for changes in the compensatory education program, it will need to decide what TAC program features should be modified or retained. This report is intended to provide information and analysis for those decisions.

Origin and Development of the TAC Program of Technical Assistance

Program and project evaluation has been a central part of the federal compensatory education program since the 1965 enactment of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), when Senator Robert F. Kennedy added the requirement that local educational agencies (LEAs) evaluate the effectiveness of their Title I projects in serving educationally deprived children. To increase local uniformity in implementing this mandate, the 1974 amendments to Title I required the Commissioner of Education to develop and implement "standards for evaluation of program or project effectiveness in achieving the objectives" of Title I, including "models for all programs conducted" under the program. The 1974 amendments also required the Commissioner to provide technical assistance to state education agencies (SEAs) "to enable them to assist LEAs in

development and application of a systematic evaluation of programs in accordance with the models."

In response to the legislative mandate, the Office of Education (OE) established ten TACs in 1976, funding them under Title I's evaluation set-aside. Under these contracts, the primary TAC objective was to assist SEAs and LEAs in adopting and implementing the newly developed evaluation models, in order to generate data on the achievement changes of Title I students. As educational agencies became increasingly familiar with the models, OE encouraged the TACs to assist in improving the quality of the Title I data.

Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA), which replaced Title I, made several changes in the program's evaluation requirements, including removal of provisions requiring (1) SEAs and LEAs to implement the Title I evaluation models and (2) federal support of technical assistance in Chapter 1 evaluation. It added a new provision, however, authorizing the Secretary of Education to "provide technical assistance . . . to promote the development and implementation of effective instructional programs. . . ." Although ED has continued to support the TACs under ECIA, it has reduced their number to four and directed them to provide assistance in improving Chapter 1 programs.

Current funding for the TACs is about $3.6 million a year, down from a high of $8.5 million in 1980-81. Funds are allocated about equally across the four TACs. The TAC regions, the current TAC contractors, and their locations are shown in Figure 1.

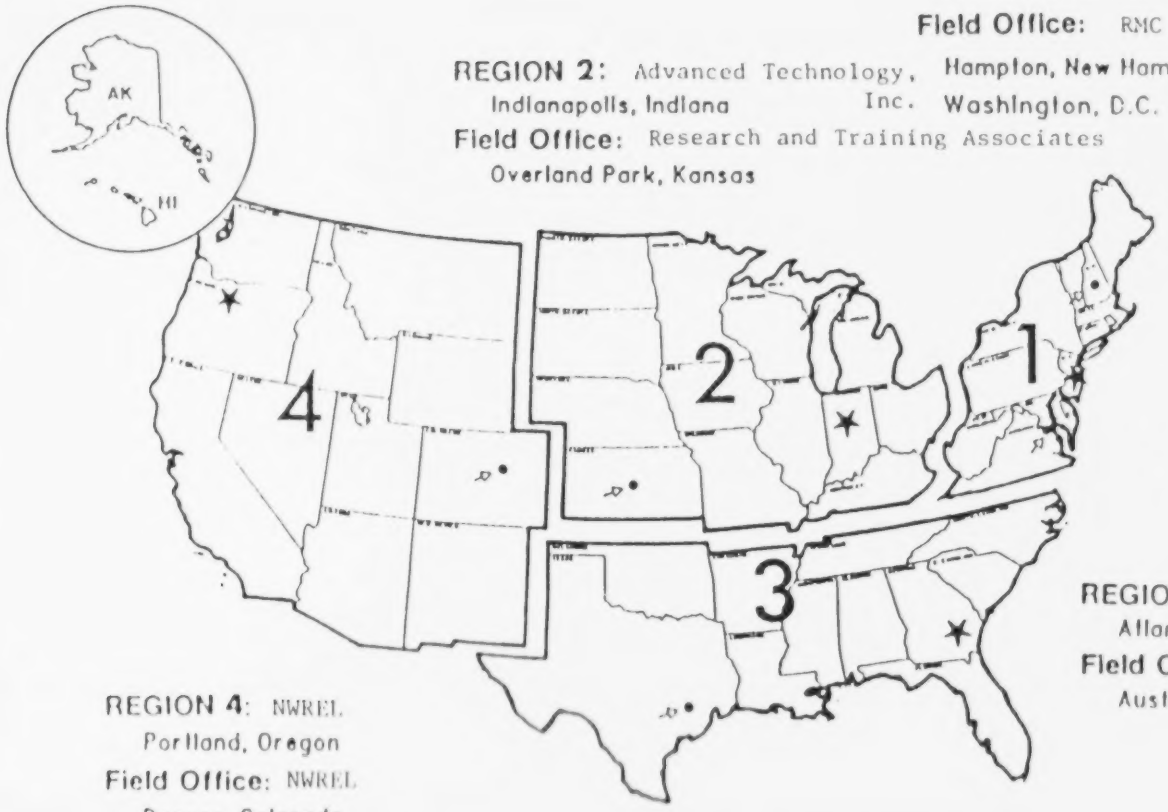
This evaluation of the TACs is the third that ED has sponsored. The earlier two were:

Figure 1

TAC REGIONS

REGION 1: Educational Testing Service
Princeton, New Jersey
Field Office: RMC Research Corporation
Hampton, New Hampshire

REGION 2: Advanced Technology, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana
Washington, D.C.
Field Office: Research and Training Associates
Overland Park, Kansas



REGION 3: Educational Testing Service
Atlanta, Georgia
Field Office: Powell Associates, Inc.
Austin, Texas

REGION 4: NWREL
Portland, Oregon
Field Office: NWREL
Denver, Colorado

Original version prepared by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

- 1978/79 Performance Review of the Technical Assistance Program

  Conducted by an OE-established panel, the review concluded that the technical assistance program was "working and working well" (Millman, Paisley, Rogers, Sanders, & Womer, 1979, p.57). It made a number of recommendations for improvement (e.g., longer contract periods, more emphasis on using evaluations to improve programs, more uniform reporting procedures), which OE implemented in the subsequent round of TAC contracts.

- 1982 Evaluation of the TACs

  Conducted as part of a larger assessment of the overall Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS--Reisner, Alkins, Boruch, Linn, & Millman, 1982), the study found that:

  -- The content of TAC assistance had "shifted from implementing the TIERS models to improving the quality and utility of evaluation data" (p. 43).

  -- The magnitude and content of services varied across states and TACs.

  -- "The amount of field service is low relative to the money expended" (p. 43).

  -- "The TAC clients are well satisfied with the TAC services and want them to continue" (p. 43).

The evaluation presented in this report addresses many of the issues raised in the earlier studies. It is intended to provide information for TAC program changes linked to the reauthorization of Chapter 1 and a competition to select new TAC contractors.

Purposes and Methods of This Evaluation

The purposes of this evaluation were to (1) describe TAC operations, especially current activities; (2) assess the utility of TAC assistance to SEAs and LEAs; and (3) examine future needs for technical assistance. The study team was not asked to evaluate the performance of individual TAC contractors.

We addressed the evaluation's first purpose through on-site interviews and the inspection of materials at each of the TAC headquarters and field

offices. The site visits utilized interview guides and debriefing forms designed to permit conclusions across TACs.

We addressed the second purpose through telephone interviews with Chapter 1 coordinators and, in some cases, evaluators in each of nine SEAs and 14 LEAs. SEAs selected for the study included one SEA served by each TAC office. The sample of SEAs included states of differing size and SEA philosophy. Our LEA sample included one LEA in each of the sample SEAs; these LEAs varied by enrollment size. In addition, we interviewed Chapter 1 coordinators in five other LEAs that had received intensive TAC assistance in improving their Chapter 1 services. We did not tell the TACs which SEAs or LEAs were in our samples, nor did we tell the SEAs which LEAs we had selected to interview. Our telephone interviews included questions regarding technical assistance needs (past, current, and future), sources of technical assistance, receipt of TAC services, and strengths and weaknesses of TAC assistance.

To learn more about future needs for Chapter 1 technical assistance, we also reviewed the relevant House and Senate reauthorization bills and the resulting act, and we interviewed Washington-based analysts familiar with reauthorization plans and current TAC capacities.

This report presents the results of our evaluation. Chapter 2 describes TAC services and operations. Chapter 3 explains the state and local contexts in which TACs provide services, especially state and local activities in program evaluation and improvement. Chapter 4 summarizes the effects of TAC services. Chapter 5 discusses the relationship between the TACs and ED. The final chapter presents alternatives for improvement in TAC services, based on current operations and our analysis of future needs.

2. TAC Services and Operations

This chapter describes the technical assistance that TACs provide and the administrative activities that they carry out to support the delivery of technical assistance. It looks at TAC services and operations primarily from the viewpoint of the TACs themselves. Subsequent chapters describe pressures exerted on the TACs by state and local users of TAC services and by ED.

TAC Services to SEAs and LEAs

Most TAC staff view evaluation and program improvement as interwoven activities. From their perspective, the goal of evaluation is to produce valid and reliable data that can be used to assess program strengths and weaknesses and guide improvement efforts. Because of this link, the distinction between assistance in evaluation and program improvement is often blurred. Even so, the Chapter 1 statute and the TACs' contractual requirements distinguish between the two kinds of assistance, as we do below.

Assistance in Chapter 1 Evaluation

Most TAC assistance in evaluation consists of short-term technical help on specific problems raised by SEAs and LEAs. Depending on the problem and the client, TAC staff generally send out prepared materials, answer questions on the telephone, or conduct workshops for state or local staff. The demand for this assistance has gradually decreased in recent years for several reasons, including the following:

- State and local Chapter 1 coordinators and evaluators understand Chapter 1 evaluation and reporting requirements better than they did in the early days of TIERS. One state coordinator whom we

interviewed said, for example, that implementation of TIERS is now "common practice."

- Because SEAs know fewer TAC staff are available to help now than several years ago, they are more likely to try and resolve minor problems on their own--and they characterize many evaluation problems as minor.

- Based on our interviews, SEAs appear to have relatively greater need for assistance in program improvement than in evaluation. Requests for improvement help have thus crowded out many requests for assistance in evaluation. The requests for help in improving programs often involve evaluation (e.g., use of sustained effects analyses to identify areas needing improvement), however.

- SEAs are aware that TACs must spend half their time on program improvement, and so they have shifted their requests accordingly. With few exceptions, both districts and states say that they welcome the emphasis on improvement.

Assistance in understanding TIERS. The kinds of evaluation problems for which SEA and LEA staff request help have shifted over time. Initially, explaining TIERS and helping SEAs and LEAs develop procedures for collecting and reporting achievement data were the main focus of TAC assistance. Although explaining TIERS is still necessary, due mostly to turnover of Chapter 1 staff, it is a relatively infrequent activity now and mainly consists of sending materials in response to requests from new staff and conducting occasional workshops as part of state or regional conferences. As one SEA respondent said, "We no longer need help on models because local and state staff have become proficient, except for sustained effects where help is still needed." Because few states use sampling any more, TACs are rarely asked to help SEAs in this area.

Help to SEAs in preparing evaluation reports. This kind of assistance is no longer a major activity for TAC staff. Although TACs still assist some SEAs with reports to ED and their LEAs, they report that they generally have too little time to do much report preparation. SEAs that use consultants to prepare their reports or that have set up good data

management systems (often with TAC help) do not request assistance with their reports. Relatively few SEAs prepare reports for their LEAs.

Advice on selecting and scoring tests. Based on our SEA and LEA interviews, help with testing issues is by far the most frequently requested form of evaluation assistance. This reflects a constant but low level of demand for information, although less now than in the past, according to TAC staff. TAC staff do not recommend specific tests, but they do provide general information about how to choose a test and the characteristics of available tests.

Most TAC assistance on testing issues addresses specific questions that SEAs or LEAs convey by telephone; for example, an LEA may have questions about the norms for a newly published version of a commercial test. TACs often answer these questions by mailing out materials prepared by either a TAC, the TACs' own Test Information Center, or the Test Center at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. TACs also sometimes provide workshops on testing issues; for example, one state obtained assistance on test selection as part of its effort to align its Chapter 1 curricula with its assessment activities.

Assistance in setting up computerized data bases. Over the last few years, many SEAs and large LEAs have turned to TACs for help in setting up computerized data bases to manage Chapter 1 participation and achievement data. The requirements for evaluating Chapter 1's sustained effects and the interest in identifying low performing schools have increased the demand for these services. In addition to other benefits, TAC and SEA staff view the automation of data entry and aggregation as one of the best ways of improving the quality of evaluation data.

TAC assistance in this area has taken several forms. In addition to helping states create data systems, TAC staffs have also developed templates for commercial data base software, permitting SEAs and LEAs to use relatively inexpensive software to track student-level data. One TAC has developed a program that automatically checks for common errors during data entry, such as scores that are out of range. SEAs and large LEAs are the main recipients of TAC help in setting up large automated data management systems, while small LEAs have received the most help in adapting software for data entry on microcomputers. Some SEAs with automated systems have obtained TAC help in upgrading their systems, as analysis demands increase. Three of the four TACs report more demand for assistance in this area than they can meet.

Help in measuring sustained effects. Another evaluation service that TACs provide is help in implementing the requirements to evaluate Chapter 1's sustained effects. The TACs have provided introductory workshops on implementing this requirement, followed in some instances by individual consultations with districts. LEAs have asked for this personalized help in order to integrate the required procedures with their regular collection and analysis of Chapter 1 participation and achievement data.

Assistance in coordinating Chapter 1 and state assessment. TAC staff see several benefits in helping to design procedures for coordinating Chapter 1 evaluation and state assessment activities. One benefit is that state testing often occurs under more controlled conditions, thus producing more accurate results than Chapter 1 testing. (According to a TAC staff member, Chapter 1 testing often occurs in the back of a busy classroom during test periods that are shortened or lengthened to fit the class period.) In addition, using the same test for Chapter 1 and state

assessment purposes reduces the testing burden on students. However, TACs and state respondents report several barriers to such coordination:

- Almost all states with their own testing programs administer tests in only a few grades--every other grade at most. Because Chapter 1 students must be tested at 12-month intervals, consecutive grades must be tested each year for Chapter 1 purposes.

- Some state assessment programs select samples of students to be tested, in order to generate scores reflecting school or district performance. The state test samples are usually not designed to reflect the performance of Chapter 1 students.

- Many state assessment instruments are tests of minimal competencies and therefore cannot measure growth in academic achievement, as required by TIERS.

- Turf issues between Chapter 1 and state assessment offices sometimes create political impediments to test coordination.

TAC assistance in coordinating test programs has taken several forms. One state Chapter 1 coordinator said, "The TAC has given us a lot of assistance" in resolving ongoing coordination problems in the state's three-year effort to shift Chapter 1 testing to the state's assessment program. In another state, the Chapter 1 coordinator reported that the TAC helped develop an LEA manual demonstrating how to use the state test for Chapter 1 purposes.

Assistance to Chapter 1 state-operated migrant education and neglected or delinquent programs. TAC directors reported varying experiences in providing evaluation assistance to these programs, although all provide more assistance to migrant education than to neglected or delinquent projects. Assistance to migrant projects takes several forms, as described below:

- TACs help some migrant projects implement TIERS, usually by explaining TIERS requirements, helping in the selection of tests, or conducting related activities. These projects mainly serve migrant students who do not move during the school year (i.e., those who are "formerly migratory" and students who move only during the summer months).

- TACs help some other migrant projects implement evaluations that do not rely on pre- and post-testing. These projects serve students who are not enrolled long enough in the school year to be tested twice.

- TACs also help some summer-only projects conduct evaluations designed to give snapshots of students' achievement levels.

- In several states, TAC staff have helped in the development of migrant education data bases intended to supplement and expand the data routinely collected for the Migrant Student Record Transfer System.

- TAC staff helped one large SEA assess the dropout problem in migrant education.

One TAC director voiced fairly low expectations for the evaluation of Chapter 1 migrant programs, "There are a lot of requests for assistance; we're fortunate if we can get them [migrant program directors] to take responsibility for evaluation and sustained effects."

Directors reported that the TAC's relationship with the state migrant office affects the provision of assistance. Because TACs work mainly with state Chapter 1 offices, they tend to have little contact with the migrant program in states where it is implemented by a separate migrant education office. The only exceptions are the TACs that have made special efforts in migrant education; their outreach efforts to migrant offices have resulted in requests for evaluation assistance. One TAC reported that it had gained access to the migrant office by offering to help with the required annual evaluation report to ED.

The TACs have very little contact with the neglected or delinquent program, mainly due to the fact that SEAs generally delegate their administrative responsibilities under the program to other state agencies (often the state department of corrections). The evaluation services mentioned in interviews were the provision of workshops at annual

conferences on neglected or delinquent education and the development of an evaluation guide.

Development of new materials and products in evaluation. TAC staff have little opportunity to create new evaluation materials. The major exception is the TACs' development and adaptation of software for managing Chapter 1 data bases. In addition, TACs develop or adapt some materials on topics such as calculating sustained effects. TACs also maintain and disseminate the results of test equating studies and annotated descriptions of available tests.

As TACs have reduced their provision of evaluation assistance, they have increased their efforts to assist SEAs and LEAs improve their Chapter 1 services.

Assistance in Program Improvement

The scope of possible TAC assistance in program improvement is far broader than in evaluation because the former involves the heart of the Chapter 1 program--the actual services provided to students. Moreover, within a single district, many different Chapter 1 programs may operate, creating many kinds of improvement needs. (A single district may have, for example, Chapter 1 reading and math programs for grades K-3, a math program for grades 4-6, and a reading program for junior high students, with each program operating differently in each participating school.) In addition, program improvement encompasses many diverse processes--from interpreting data to planning change, rethinking curriculum and instruction, involving parents, coordinating with and influencing the regular program, developing strategies for self-assessment at the teacher and program levels, and more.

Unlike evaluation, instructional improvement is a topic that commands little professional agreement. Although educators generally agree on some

of the factors characterizing effective programs (e.g., strong instructional leadership, high expectations for students), there is far less agreement on how to transform an ineffective program into an effective one.

In spite of these complications, both TAC and SEA staff report growing demand for assistance in improving Chapter 1 programs. In our telephone interviews, SEA respondents described many more needs for assistance in program improvement than in evaluation. TAC staff said that the availability of program improvement help has created many new types of involvement with LEAs. As a result, TACs face the following challenges in our view:

- More demand exists for program improvement assistance than TACs can meet, even taking into account those states that exhibit little interest in improvement.
- Successful assistance in improving Chapter 1 services requires more than communicating the principles of effective programs (which most SEA and LEA staff already know). It requires face-to-face, sustained help, either through a series of workshops or on-site consultations, activities that are time-consuming and expensive. Providing a single workshop or mailing out materials is not enough.
- Program improvement assistance must also accommodate sensitivities and traditions stronger than those characterizing local evaluation practice.
- As a result TACs must balance intensity and duration of assistance against the numbers of LEAs and LEA staff whom they will help.

TAC staff differ somewhat in their views on the kinds of assistance they should provide in program improvement. Most agree that generating good evaluation data is a first step; they also agree that multiple sources of data are needed to guide improvement efforts (for example, information about the regular program as well as Chapter 1 services and the degree of coordination between the two). Differences arise over how to go beyond data interpretation to actual guidance in improving Chapter 1 programs. Should TACs recommend particular curricular or instructional approaches? Where

should they draw the line between recommending general strategies that are strongly supported by research and specific instructional practices or materials?

Just as TACs do not recommend particular tests, their contracts also prevent them from recommending particular curricula, materials, or pedagogical techniques. Instead, they are expected to focus on general strategies, often by helping state and local staff review their program data, draw conclusions about program components that are weak (or strong), and develop plans to strengthen (or extend) them. In conducting these activities, TAC staff try to help LEAs recognize that they are responsible for making their programs as effective as possible, not simply for meeting all the legal requirements.

Formats for program improvement assistance. The TACs have chosen to provide most of their improvement assistance in one or more of three ways--consultations within a specific LEA, workshop series, and summer institutes.

- On-site consultations have the advantage of focusing on a particular program in its own setting, with enough personal contact to support follow-up activities by phone or in person. The time required, however, limits the number of LEAs and programs that can be assisted.

- Three of the four TACs provide much of their assistance through series of workshops. Staff in these TACs said that a series of three workshops constitutes the best trade-off between one-shot workshops, which have little lasting effect, and on-site consultations, which can only be provided for a limited number of LEAs.

- One TAC offers week-long summer institutes, which representatives of several LEAs attend. Here Chapter 1 staff participate in the equivalent of a five-day workshop, and TAC staff are available to answer specific questions throughout the week. The institutes are held on college campuses, and LEA staff receive academic credit for participating.

Because workshop series are the most prevalent method of improvement help, they warrant special attention. Typically, a series of three program

improvement workshops is offered to teams from several districts. The number of LEAs, composition of the teams, location of the workshop, role of the SEA in the assistance, and procedures for selecting LEAs vary across TACs and states. The number of LEAs can range from one to over a dozen. The teams may include the local Chapter 1 coordinator, a Chapter 1 teacher and perhaps an aide, a regular teacher, and a Chapter 1 school principal. The SEA frequently suggests where the workshops should be held; for example, an SEA may ask a low performing district to host the workshops, knowing that otherwise they would not attend, or the SEA may have political reasons for wanting the workshops to be held in a certain region of the state. Workshop series and summer institutes are especially popular and efficient in regions with many small LEAs.

Except for occasional subtle coercion by an SEA, LEA participation in the workshops is generally voluntary. TAC staff report that it is difficult enough working with those who are interested in improvement, given the time constraints. Attempting to provide improvement assistance to unwilling recipients would likely be a waste of time, in their view. Those LEAs that volunteer must agree to send the required team and attend all three workshops in the series.

Across the TACs, the workshop series tend to be structured in roughly similar ways. The first workshop typically focuses on self-assessment. LEAs bring their evaluation data and review and interpret it with help from TAC staff. In one region, for example, TAC staff present a graph showing state and national Chapter 1 achievement test means with space for LEAs to enter their own scores; this process indicates to LEA representatives that apparent annual gains in overall Chapter 1 achievement are not always

sufficient to keep Chapter 1 students from losing ground relative to other students. It also shows where the LEA stands relative to other districts.

The second workshop, generally held a month or so later, leads the teams through (1) an analysis of their program's strengths and weaknesses using data elements and (2) the first steps in creating an improvement plan. An LEA's analyses may indicate, for example, that students receiving Chapter 1 reading services improved their achievement at a steady rate but that the rate of improvement dropped significantly when the services stopped. The rough outline of an improvement plan for this LEA could include (1) greater Chapter 1 coordination with the regular reading and language arts program and (2) periodic follow-up services to former Chapter 1 reading participants.

Because additional LEA staff usually need to be involved in developing a plan, the team completes the plan between the second and third workshops, which are typically a month to six weeks apart. During the third workshop, LEA and TAC staff review the improvement plans and discuss potential problems in implementation.

TAC staff usually follow up with LEA participants after each workshop. This may include sending each LEA a reminder letter about the next workshop, providing written comments on improvement goals and plans, telephoning LEA teams to inquire about implementation problems and needs for further assistance, and inviting LEAs to participate in the series again. Several LEAs we contacted said that their SEAs had also followed up with them after TAC workshops.

TAC staff report that in some states SEA personnel attend every TAC activity, including the workshops. Sometimes they attend simply to check on the services the TAC is providing; occasionally SEA staff also want to learn

how to conduct the workshops themselves using the TAC's materials. Although TACs cannot determine the quality and content of the workshops when someone else conducts them, they endorse and support the development of SEA capacities to help address the growing demand for improvement assistance. Relatively few SEAs have been willing to work with TACs in this way, however, according to TAC staff.

Another way TACs sometimes increase their leverage is to act as brokers in providing improvement assistance. Tied into larger networks of education experts, TAC staff report that they sometimes match state and local needs with experts housed in SEAs, LEAs, universities, federally sponsored labs and centers, and other institutions.

Educational content on which assistance is based. In workshop series and in single workshops and consultations, TAC staff often present findings from recent research, according to our interviews with SEAs and LEAs. For example, TAC staff may summarize the research on students' time on task and teach Chapter 1 teachers how to keep track of the amount of off-task time in their classrooms as a basis for increasing on-task time. Other research-based topics addressed in program improvement assistance include parent involvement, coordination with the regular instructional program, reading comprehension, and thinking skills. Several of the local Chapter 1 personnel whom we interviewed placed particular importance on the TAC as a source of research information on effective compensatory education; one respondent said she speaks to TAC staff frequently to discuss "areas of interest . . . and exchange journal articles."

All four of the TACs make use of the 13 principles of effective Chapter 1 programs developed by ED (and known as "the 13 attributes"), according to TAC staff. This list includes seven organizational factors

(e.g., strong leadership, clear goals, parent involvement) and six instructional process factors (e.g., maximum use of academic learning time, high expectations, close monitoring of progress). The Chapter 1 director in one LEA said that a TAC workshop on the 13 attributes "brought theory into practice" and "fired up" the workshop participants to assess and improve the district's Chapter 1 project.

Other educational content used in technical assistance depends on the knowledge of TAC staff members. For example, in TACs that employ a reading expert, improvements in reading comprehension may be a focus of assistance. Several SEA Chapter 1 coordinators cited the Commission on Reading's report, Becoming a Nation of Readers, as a guide that their TAC had shared.

Although TACs develop few major products due to a lack of time and other resources, they create materials used in the workshops as well as other materials used to generate interest in improvement. For example, one TAC has used the applications of successful projects under the Secretary's Recognition Program to develop a series of reports organized around the 13 attributes. Each report in the series, entitled "In Their Own Words," consists of application excerpts that illustrate the ways that projects have implemented ED's improvement principles. In addition to these reports, SEA respondents in our telephone interviews cited TAC workshop materials (e.g., handouts and overheads) and research summaries as having been useful to them. One very large LEA with whom we spoke adopted two workshops that the TAC developed on time management and student study skills and now conducts them for LEA personnal.

Coordination of improvement assistance with state programs. States with their own improvement activities exert special pressures on TACs. While the improvement-oriented states often have their own capacity for

technical assistance, they also often have a lengthy improvement agenda, for which they may want TAC help. At the other extreme, TAC staff report that it is difficult to deliver effective program improvement assistance in the few states that have no improvement agenda at all (usually states where Chapter 1 officials define responsibilities in terms of enforcing compliance).

Issues of coordination between TAC services and state improvement efforts rarely arise, however, even in those states with heavily funded state reform programs, according to TAC staff. State improvement efforts usually do not reach into the Chapter 1 program, sometimes because of turf issues at the SEA level and concern over Chapter 1 compliance at the LEA level. (In addition, state improvement initiatives often focus on changes unrelated to Chapter 1, such as increasing teacher salaries and reducing class size.) Moreover, the level of TAC services is too low to pose conflicts with broader statewide efforts. In fact, because TAC staff work almost exclusively with Chapter 1 staff, there are limited opportunities for overlap with state improvement programs. One exception we found was an SEA where the Chapter 1 staff asked TAC staff to describe their improvement workshop series to staff of the state improvement program; the purpose of this activity was to share information, however, not to coordinate services.

Implementation of ED improvement initiatives. According to TAC staff, the Secretary's Recognition Program takes little staff time now and is not viewed as program improvement assistance by most TAC staff members. During the first two years of the Recognition Program, TAC staff helped LEAs with their applications, often at the SEA's request. This help focused on organizing and interpreting evaluation data for inclusion in the application and writing the description of the LEA project. TACs still provide this

assistance occasionally but at a much lower level of effort than before; at most, some TACs conduct information workshops for districts that are preparing applications and occasionally review program applications before submission to ED.

Despite encouragement from ED, TAC staff tend not to focus their assistance on low performing districts. The primary reason is that states are generally unwilling to identify districts that are performing poorly. Sometimes their lack of willingness stems from a distrust of their own data: when one SEA used TIERS data to identify the five best and five worst projects in the state, closer analyses revealed that the data on all ten were flawed and that the projects were performing at average levels. Another state told us that identifying ineffective projects would be a waste of time because the real problem in these districts is a lack of money to hire qualified teachers. In addition, as noted before, TACs are reluctant to work with districts that have not requested assistance.

The exceptions to this trend are noteworthy, however. One state Chapter 1 coordinator described the TAC's help in the state's three-week summer institutes, which are provided for Chapter 1 programs with low performance gains. Another state plans to require administrators and teachers from districts scoring in the lowest five percent on the state assessment to attend TAC regional workshops on improvement, according to the state Chapter 1 coordinator. In addition, we contacted two LEAs whose SEA had quietly recommended that the TAC offer them assistance; both LEAs said that TAC help had been valuable.

Assistance to Chapter 1 state-operated migrant education and neglected or delinquent programs. As in evaluation, the TACs provide very little assistance in program improvement to neglected or delinquent programs.

Migrant programs receive somewhat more help, but it is generally not provided in the same intensive formats (i.e., workshop series or on-site consultations) that are used with LEAs operating projects under the Chapter 1 basic grant program. Instead, program improvement assistance in migrant education generally consists of single workshops at annual meetings. According to one TAC director, typical workshops deal with "new ideas in reading comprehension, time on task, setting high expectations, and math instruction."

Examples of how TACs assist LEAs in program improvement. To obtain specific examples of how TACs can work with LEAs, we interviewed Chapter 1 coordinators and other administrators in five LEAs chosen from those where TACs said they had worked successfully on program improvement. The following descriptions summarize the services that TACs provided in these districts:

- The TAC approached one large LEA at the urging of the SEA Chapter 1 coordinator, who was concerned about poor performance in several of the district's inner-city Chapter 1 schools. Working under the direction of the TAC, the LEA assembled sixteen school teams and central office staff members to participate in a series of TAC workshops, which addressed school-level self-assessment, the development of improvement plans, and analysis of plan implementation. The plans emphasized improvements in reading instruction, parent involvement, and student time on task. Between and after the workshops, the LEA maintained contact with the TAC and the SEA to discuss specific concerns and to communicate results.

- Over a two-year period, 14 schools in a medium-sized city participated in two series of highly structured workshops that the TAC conducted. In the first workshop, "leadership teams" assessed their schools' performance by analyzing their TIERS scores and their implementation of ED's 13 characteristics of effective Chapter 1 projects. On the basis of this information, the teams selected their "target areas" for Chapter 1 improvement. In the next two workshops the teams developed improvement plans and evaluated their implementation of the plans. The TAC stayed in touch with the schools between workshops and afterwards to help with implementation problems and answer questions.

- Another SEA asked the TAC to contact Chapter 1 project administrators in a small city, and the LEA agreed to assemble school teams to participate in a workshop series similar to that described in the first example. Two special concerns addressed in the workshops were the teaching of critical thinking skills and the early prevention of school failure. In addition, the workshops included discussions of improvements in achievement testing and other evaluation techniques, coordination with the district's Chapter 1 parent advisory council, and public relations within the community.

- The LEA of a medium-sized city participated in TAC workshops over a three-year period. Workshops in the first year focused on (1) analysis of improvement needs using local evaluation data and (2) development of an improvement plan. In the second and third years, the TAC provided workshops to assist in implementing the plan. This assistance included help in improving Chapter 1 reading instruction, selecting and using computer software for analyzing program data, designing a pilot program for Chapter 1 parent involvement, and implementing the state improvement program. The LEA's evaluation procedures permitted analysis of improvements in student time on task, matching those changes against improvements in Chapter 1 student achievement.

- In a small LEA, the Chapter 1 coordinator contacted the TAC for program improvement assistance after attending a state-level workshop. The coordinator was impressed with the TAC's approach and invited the TAC to send someone to visit the LEA and discuss ways of improving the district's low Chapter 1 achievement rates. TAC staff met with the superintendent and principals, visited Chapter 1 classrooms, and then conducted several inservice training sessions for Chapter 1 teachers and other staff. The sessions focused on improving student time on task through new curricular approaches, especially in reading. The approaches included (1) better use of data on individual student performance, (2) greater coordination between classroom teachers and Chapter 1 staff, (3) more systematic selection of students to participate in Chapter 1 services, and (4) reduced use of pullout instruction.

Changes in program improvement assistance. Although we looked for changes over time in the kinds of program improvement assistance that have been requested and provided, we conclude that it is too soon to see major shifts. We did discern that TACs are spending less time on the Recognition Program and more time on program improvement workshops. Most important, perhaps, TAC staff see a rapid increase in local requests for program improvement assistance. In many states, the improvement workshops have been the first contact between local program staff and TACs. LEAs' awareness of

the TACs' services in this area appears to create demands for more assistance. This trend is reinforced by the districts that participate in the improvement workshops for the first time each year, thereby adding to the number of districts that ask for continued assistance.

Allocation of TAC Services

As the demand for TAC assistance increases, decisions on allocating services become more important. We found that TACs make three kinds of allocation decisions: how much service to provide each state, how to divide a state's services between the SEA and its LEAs, and what types of services to provide. TAC staff make these decisions in consultation with their SEA counterparts as part of the annual negotiation of plans for TAC services. These plans are articulated in "letters of agreement" with each SEA.

Allocation of Services Among States

TACs' decisions on how to assign their technical assistance resources across states takes several factors into account. The most important is the relatively low level of resources available under the TAC program. Data analyzed in this study indicated that in the year ended September 30, 1987, the TACs were staffed with a total of 42.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel, of whom professional staff constituted 30.1 FTE, support staff made up 1.1 FTE, and clerical staff amounted to 11.2 FTE. These staff resources are spread among 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The need to provide some level of service to each of these states and other entities imposes a low maximum amount of service that can be provided to any one of them. Second, each entity must receive certain minimum amounts of attention and service, including negotiation of a letter of agreement and periodic

communication with the SEA's link to the TAC (usually the state Chapter 1 coordinator or the head of the SEA's evaluation office). The need to maintain this level of communication establishes a certain minimum level of service to each SEA.

Within these upper and lower bounds, the TAC determines an overall level of service to a state based on its Chapter 1 enrollment, the state's past demand for TAC services, and any unusual circumstances such as a major state initiative relevant to Chapter 1. Because the service floor and ceiling moderate the difference in service level among states, more populous states usually receive somewhat more service than other states but not in amounts proportional to their enrollment. From year to year, the overall amount of TAC service to each state remains about the same, unless there is a change in TAC funding level or state circumstances.

The letters of agreement describe the aggregate amount of service that is planned for each state in terms of the number of days of service the state will receive. One TAC described the letter of agreement as the starting point for planning services; the director of that TAC said that more days can sometimes be found for a state, depending on the state's level of need. Another TAC director said that, while the letters of agreement are a starting point, his primary method of determining allocations of TAC effort is "first come, first served." He meant that the TAC is mainly interested in responding to state needs and that he will find a way to address the most pressing needs in each state. TACs often reallocate resources within a state during the year, either from one type of SEA service to another or from the SEA to LEAs.

Allocation of Services Between an SEA and the State's LEAs

Decisions about allocating services between the SEA and the state's LEAs are also negotiated in the letters of agreement, although the level of detail varies. The major factor determining these decisions is the preference of the SEA, according to TAC staff. Some SEAs prefer to receive the bulk of assistance themselves, while others encourage the TAC to deliver services directly to LEAs. According to one TAC director, the reduction of TAC services in the early 1980s prompted many SEAs to eliminate TAC services to LEAs, and in many cases the SEA has not reversed these decisions.

Among the SEAs that allow the TAC to assist LEAs, many want to be kept informed and, in some cases, offered the opportunity to participate in the service. Other SEAs ask that the TAC work directly with LEAs, without involving the SEA. In the latter group of states, the TAC may be asked to work with LEAs on a "first come, first served" basis until the state's allocation is exhausted, or the SEA may negotiate a specific number of days for certain LEAs.

SEAs that want the TAC to assist LEAs directly may or may not specify which LEAs are to be assisted. Some states target small districts to receive services, usually because they are less likely to have relevant expertise or access to other resources. Others target only very large districts, because of the number of Chapter 1 students they serve--and perhaps also because they wield political power in the state. As noted earlier, a few states concentrate a portion of TAC services on ineffective districts.

Decisions on What Types of Services To Provide in a State

SEAs largely determine the services they receive from the TAC, due to the TACs' orientation towards the SEA as their main client. However,

factors other than their own needs influence SEAs' requests for service. These include their perception of the capabilities of the TAC and their awareness of the constraints that ED imposes on the TACs. For example, several TAC directors said that SEAs requested more program improvement assistance once ED said that TACs should devote at least half of their resources to that area.

TACs also report that they have pushed SEAs towards requesting help in program improvement. But, as one TAC director said, "Even when we are proactive, we react to the way the states want it handled."

TAC Administration

We turn now to look at the activities and capacities that combine to create the administrative arrangements for providing TAC services. These include the organizations in which the TACs are housed, the staff employed to deliver services, their management procedures, and their use of funds.

Organizations Operating the TACs

Seven organizations currently participate in operating TACs. One organization, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, operates both the headquarters and field offices of one region, but in the other three regions the headquarters and field offices are operated by different organizations. In these regions, a prime contractor operates the TAC headquarters office, and a subcontractor operates the TAC field office. Educational Testing Services (ETS) is the prime contractor in two TAC regions but operates the two contracts out of different ETS regional offices.

In general, we found relatively little contact between the three prime contractors and their subcontractors. In each of the three TACs that have subcontractors, the two offices work independently, preparing separate

budgets and conducting management activities independently. Prime contractors and subcontractors communicate mainly on matters such as preparing reports to ED and monthly invoices. Although they may occasionally coordinate on technical matters, the amount of such coordination is about the same as that between TACs, which is relatively little.

Surprisingly, the prime contractors do not necessarily provide greater amounts of staff effort than their subcontractors. Two field offices report slightly higher levels of effort (based on FTEs reported for the year ended September 30, 1987) than the corresponding headquarters offices. In these three regions, the headquarters offices reported FTEs ranging from 7.1 to 4.4. Effort expended in the three field offices ranged from 5.5 to 4.6 FTEs. (Across all eight TAC offices, effort levels ranged from 7.4 to 3.1 FTE staff each, averaging 5.3 FTE staff per office.)

Each of the seven organizations in which TAC offices are housed conducts applied research or related activities for other clients. Several of the organizations conduct extensive research and technical assistance in areas directly related to the work of the TAC. The extent of those operations is relevant to TAC operations in several respects:

- TACs operating in organizations with large staffs engaged in educational research and technical assistance are able to assign qualified staff to the TAC as needed on short notice and for small amounts of time on specialized assignments.

- The other work of these organizations (e.g., curriculum development, computerized data base development, testing) contributes to the technical capacity of the TAC in some situations.

- These organizations also offer (1) career ladders to TAC staff with ambitions to move into senior administrative positions in educational research and assistance and (2) professional colleagues with whom TAC staff can try out ideas and discuss service-related problems.

- On the other hand, smaller organizations or organizations with no other work in TAC-related fields offer greater staffing stability, since staff are less likely to be reassigned or promoted to other work.

The professional advantages offered by the large, education-oriented organizations can be achieved in other ways by other organizations, however, such as through the development of professional networks complementing the capacities of the TAC staff.

Characteristics of TAC Staff

Our review of staffing looks at both staff assignments and the hiring of TAC staff.

Staff assignments. TAC directors assign staff according to the needs and characteristics of the states the TAC serves. One or two staff members are usually assigned to work with each state, although they may each be spending far less than full time on the state. The staff member who is the lead contact with the state generally maintains regular communication with his/her SEA counterpart and arranges for all the TAC services needed in the state. Where appropriate, the TAC staff members responsible for working with the state actually deliver the services that the state uses, although sometimes they serve as brokers in arranging services that others with relevant qualifications provide.

Most TAC staff members have lead responsibility for one or two states. The exception is staff members hired to work with all the states in a region. Data base developers, for example, are usually qualified to work only in that area and are expected to work with all states needing help in developing or maintaining a Chapter 1 data base.

TAC directors report that states value continuity in TAC staffing, so that they try to maintain the same state assignments for as long as possible. They also try to match the TAC staff contact with the needs and

characteristics of the state. For example, some states may place a high value on systems expertise or, at the other end of the spectrum, innovative instructional strategies; TAC directors try to respond to those interests by assigning staff who have the qualifications or characteristics that the SEA values. In general, TAC directors also try to assign more senior staff (often themselves) to the largest states.

One factor limiting flexibility in staff assignments is that TACs conduct no ongoing formal training of their staff members. Newly hired staff are usually assigned to work with a more experienced staff member for the first month, and then they are expected to begin delivering services on their own. After the first month's experience, staff are given no further formal training in technical assistance methods. Because of the demand for service delivery, TAC staff generally have no time to devote to reading professional journals in educational evaluation and program improvement.

TAC staff are usually organized in a flat structure, with all professional staff reporting to the director of the TAC office. The director usually has lead or sole responsibility for reviewing each staff member's performance annually and determining salary increases.

Considerations in hiring TAC staff. TAC directors indicated clear preferences on the qualifications they look for in hiring new staff. These include the following:

- Strong interpersonal skills, which should translate into the ability to understand and talk to SEA and LEA staff,
- Familiarity with Chapter 1 or other educational programs at state and local levels,
- Evaluation skills,
- Familiarity with educational improvement methods, including current research in the area, and
- Personal commitment to the goals of the TAC.

TAC directors said that they do not consider it essential for new TAC employees to have strong educational measurement qualifications. So long as at least one person in the office has strong skills in this area, that individual can serve as a resource to the entire office.

They reported increasing difficulty in recruiting qualified staff members and retaining current staff, due to competition from LEAs. All of the TAC directors said that LEAs now pay higher salaries than they can pay on the TAC contracts, so that they must recruit much more extensively than before. Several TAC directors also reported problems of retaining staff members, due to "burn-out," resulting from pressures to provide more services than the TACs are staffed to provide.

Another consideration in hiring new staff is that the ED project monitors review each proposed new hire before the TAC can make a job offer. Because that office's staffing priorities sometimes differ from the TAC director's (e.g., more ED interest in academic credentials), a TAC must sometimes reject a person whom the director finds qualified because the ED monitors might not find him/her acceptable.

Management Procedures That TACs Use

The main management technique that TACs employ is tracking the use of professional time. They use several tools in this process, as follows:

- Some of the TACs track the use of days allocated in the letters of agreement. One TAC office sends quarterly reports to each state, enumerating the days spent and the days available for the next quarter.

- All TACs require each staff member to maintain time sheets, which use the TAC contract tasks to describe how the staff member's TAC time is spent. The time allocations are summarized at least monthly to determine how the staff as a whole is using its time. This information is required to be submitted to ED.

- TAC directors monitor costs by reviewing monthly expenditures and approving in advance all expenditures for travel and non-labor direct costs over a certain minimum.

Using this information, each TAC director determines whether too much or too little effort is going into the TAC's various activities. As needed, the director reassigns effort among states, staff, and activities. Our review of aggregate time allocations for each of the TAC offices indicated, for the year ended September 30, 1987, how TACs divided their staff time across the activity categories in the current TAC contracts. Table 1 presents the percentage of staff time allotted to each category, along with the highest and lowest allotments among the four TACs.

As the table shows, TACs spend almost three-fourths of their staff time delivering technical assistance, with over half of that assistance aimed at program improvement. Although percentages for evaluation and program improvement assistance vary across TACs, our interviews with TAC staff indicate that much of that variation reflects differences in how activities are classified.

The other major TAC activity is project management. We found that some TAC directors classify most of their supervisory time as management, while other directors consider most supervision to be part of the TAC's technical assistance services.

Use of TAC Funds

Analysis of TAC hourly costs indicates that one hour of TAC time in the year ended September 30, 1987, cost an average of $35.38, including applicable indirect costs and excluding direct costs such as travel, materials, and incidentals. The highest average hourly cost among the four TACs was $40.05, and the lowest average cost was $31.76. Broken down by personnel level, the average hourly cost for professional time across all four TACs was $41.57, with $25.26 an hour required for the time of support

Table 1

Time Spent by the Four TACs on Each Major TAC Activity
(in percents)

Activity	TAC Average	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent
Letters of agreement	1	1	0
Technical assistance in evaluation	33	40	28
Technical assistance in program improvement	40	46	35
Technical investigations	1	2	0
Additional tasks (a)	6	9	2
Maintenance of staff expertise	4	7	1
Outreach and awareness	3	5	1
Management	10	18	4
TAC directors' meetings	2	2	1
Total	100		

(a) Includes clearinghouse for workshop materials, test information center, special presentations or workshops, and development of materials to be used across TACs.

personnel and $19.67 an hour for clerical time. Compared to hourly costs of firms and nonprofit organizations that provide comparable educational assistance and research services, these costs are reasonable.

We analyzed the allocation of expenses between labor and other direct costs and found that the TACs used an average of 80 percent of their resources for labor-related expenses and 20 percent for expenses related to other direct costs. Only the TAC located in the region requiring the most travel used more than 20 percent of its funds for other direct costs.

Conclusion

As this chapter documents, the TACs provide a broad range of services intended to help SEAs and LEAs improve the quality and effectiveness of the instruction provided in Chapter 1 projects. TAC services address these improvement goals from two angles, directly through technical assistance in improving programs and indirectly through technical assistance in improving the information available for assessing educational effectiveness. Despite variations across TACs, they seem in general to have selected technical assistance strategies that are consistent with their program goals. Moreover, these are implemented within administrative frameworks that generally support the delivery of the intended services.

The major exceptions to this picture of a coherent, efficient system of technical assistance are:

- TACs continue to provide some services (e.g., explaining TIERS, helping prepare SEA reports) that SEAs should be able to handle on their own.
- TAC assistance in program improvement does not consistently involve SEAs in a way that helps them improve their own capabilities.
- The availability of TAC assistance in program improvement is creating demands for services that may exceed the current system's capacity to fulfill.
- Large states are not receiving an equitable share of TAC service, due to the high floor of service necessary for each state and the low aggregate level of service.
- TAC offices have relatively little contact with each other and thus have little opportunity to share materials and approaches.
- TAC staff receive little or no formal training in the provision of technical assistance.

To understand more about the context in which TAC services are delivered, we turn now to review the characteristics of SEAs and LEAs that influence their needs for and use of the technical assistance TACs provide.

3. The Users of TAC Assistance

TAC services are intended to extend and improve the capacities of SEAs and school districts, especially in the Chapter 1 and evaluation offices. Because users call on the TACs to help them solve specific problems or to teach them new skills, the TACs' work reflects the expertise, preferences, and habits of these agencies. Recent research, including other Chapter 1 studies as well as this one, has described the staffing, capacities, and activities of state and local Chapter 1 offices. We draw on our research and the recent literature to discuss who uses (or could use) the TACs, what they are doing in the areas of program evaluation and improvement, how they use technical assistance, and both the actual and potential contributions of TACs to their work.

Users at the State Level

This discussion examines SEAs' capacity and activities in the administration of Chapter 1 and how TACs can supplement their work.

Staff Capacity

Some 600 FTE staff members work in state Chapter 1 offices, according to a survey conducted in 1986 for the National Assessment of Chapter 1 (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). This number, based on a survey of 49 SEAs, represents a decline from the last year of Title I, as shown in Table 2. The largest category of SEA employees working on Chapter 1 is that of "generalists," numbering 330 in the 49 SEAs, as the table shows, or an average of six to seven FTEs per state. These staff members include the state Chapter 1 director and others who review local Chapter 1 applications,

Table 2

Number of SEA Staff Under Title 1 and Chapter 1

Functions (a)	Number of FTEs Title 1 (1981-82)	Number of FTEs Chapter 1 (1985-86)	Percent Change (1981-82 to 1985-86)
Generalist (b)	466	330	-29
Specialist (c)	157	113	-28
Subject specialist	32	26	-19
Parent specialist	10	3	-70
Evaluation specialist	32	27	-16
Audit/fiscal specialist	83	57	-31
Other (d)	46	21	-54
Secretarial	212	141	-33
Total	881	605	-31

(a) Data were collected from 49 SEAs.
(b) These are staff who have general oversight responsibilities for Chapter 1 operations in particular school districts. This number includes the state Chapter 1 director.
(c) The number of states reporting specialist functions varies.
(d) Examples include information writer, officer manager, administrative assistant, and attorney.

Source: State survey conducted for the Chapter 1 National Assessment, 1985-86.

monitor local programs, answer questions about regulations, and coordinate technical assistance from the state. Chapter 1 offices also have an average of just over two FTE "specialists," about half of whom specialize in fiscal matters. The remaining specialists include the people who assist districts with evaluation, curriculum and instruction, and parent involvement.

Chapter 1 evaluation is the specialty of about 27 FTE staff in state Chapter 1 offices. Some offices have a full-time professional working on evaluation; more have a staff member who divides his or her time between

evaluation and other responsibilities, such as monitoring districts; in some states no one in the Chapter 1 office specializes in evaluation, and experts from other offices handle this function.

Staffing levels are similar for Chapter 1 subject specialists, who number about 26 FTE nationwide. Some states have at least one staff member whose job is to work in an area such as Chapter 1 reading programs. Other states' Chapter 1 offices rely on the subject-matter experts in other bureaus of the SEA.

Although there is no "typical" SEA, the findings of a set of case studies of state and local Chapter 1 administration provide a generalized description of the staff characteristics from a sample of 20 SEA Chapter 1 offices (Farrar & Millsap, 1986). Many staff members have lengthy tenure in the SEA, and most were trained within the Title I program framework. Often the longer-tenured staff are especially proficient in regulatory issues, while "more recently hired SEA staff tend to have expertise in such areas as reading, curriculum development, school improvement or effectiveness, and evaluation" (Farrar & Millsap, 1986, p. 23). SEA staff members commonly have experience at the local level, in positions that include teacher, principal, or curriculum specialist, as well as local Chapter 1 director.

SEA Staff Activities

Most SEA Chapter 1 staff members concentrate their efforts on ensuring local compliance with the law and regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 1987; Farrar & Millsap, 1986). Monitoring programs on-site, reviewing local applications, and advising districts by telephone on the acceptability of particular practices are traditional state activities that absorb staff time. Even among the newer staff members with particular expertise in educational content, most are being trained as generalists to concentrate on

regulatory compliance. In addition, however, SEAs report that they spend time on the issues of evaluation and program improvement that TACs help with.

Many SEA activities related to evaluation are simply the clarification and oversight of procedural requirements (Farrar & Millsap, 1986). The SEA Chapter 1 directors whom we interviewed have continued to use TIERS, endorsing its value to them and national audiences as a way of evaluating Chapter 1. The use of TIERS was required by 39 out of 49 SEAs at the time the National Assessment surveyed them in 1986. In addition, some SEAs analyze raw scores for their districts, and some compile reports that may include an analysis of effective program approaches. Some offer workshops or other assistance to encourage evaluation use and connect evaluation with program improvement. Some of the SEAs we interviewed use the TIERS data to inform their monitoring. The Chapter 1 director in one state said that, if local scores indicate little or no gain, monitors will work with the local staff to "analyze" the program.

In large states or those with a special interest in evaluation, the staff that works on these activities may be sizable and technically sophisticated. However, with a nationwide average of less than one FTE employee per state overseeing evaluation requirements as well as offering assistance, the scope of assistance available from most states is necessarily limited. Furthermore, a TAC staff member told us, "A lot of state evaluators don't have much formal training in evaluation. Many inherit the job by default. Others know evaluation but don't know the Chapter 1 program." This staff member said that across five states, just two state evaluators have "any testing expertise."

The SEAs in our sample reported a variety of efforts to improve Chapter 1 in their states. They typically offer workshops for Chapter 1 administrators and teachers, which principals and other staff may also attend. Others mentioned their participation in the Secretary's Recognition Program. However, the likely effects of this participation on program improvement seem limited. Submitting applications, which many states do, does not benefit any districts other than the one applying. Two states mentioned that they disseminate information on model programs, but none mentioned dissemination or implementation efforts that went beyond the transmission of information--a notoriously weak lever on program improvement.

SEA staff reported that they are working on several issues in Chapter 1 improvement, including coordination with the regular program, parent involvement, use of computerized data bases, and various state-designed procedures for reviewing and using data on program effects. Some said that they use evaluation data to identify low scoring districts and provide extra assistance to these districts. Some have used the research on effective schools, including the list of 13 attributes, as the basis for a recommended process of local self-assessment.

The amount of time an SEA devotes to program improvement varies, but the findings of Farrar and Millsap indicate that it is often limited. Those researchers identified two types of SEAs, which they called "traditional" and "changing." The traditional states, emphasizing compliance and often adhering to the Title I requirements that Chapter 1 removed, were not oblivious to program quality but in practice did little to further it:

> In conversations with SEA Chapter 1 staff in traditional states about the technical assistance they provide to improve programs, most spoke of their efforts to clarify the law and to help districts modify program designs, materials, and documentation to achieve compliance.

> Rarely did they mention technical assistance in terms of curricular or instructional areas. Some staff--particularly newer members with backgrounds in curriculum and instruction--offered program improvement suggestions to teachers, and ran ad hoc technical assistance sessions during monitoring visits. But instances of this kind of substantive help were rare in traditional states. Annual statewide Chapter 1 meetings usually include sessions devoted to instructional issues and techniques that work with youngsters. But insofar as technical assistance for program improvement is thought to require qualified assisters and sustained work, traditional state Chapter 1 offices provide virtually no program related technical assistance. (p. 131)

The "changing" states in that study did more to teach districts how to analyze and improve their programs, to disseminate information on effective programs, or to create requirements or incentives for local improvement. Because these efforts were new, their local effects might not yet have had time to appear. However, at the time of the research, district staff characterized state help with their programs as modest at best. Of 27 districts in nine states (six "traditional" and three "changing"), six districts reported that the state had helped with program quality.

Farrar and Millsap found that SEAs have adapted their activities in different ways over the past few years, as their staffing levels have decreased. Some have made a policy decision to de-emphasize program mechanics, and some of these states now report that they use more of their resources to work with districts on program development and quality. Others have attempted to maintain the same level of attention to the details of compliance, reducing their assistance to districts in areas such as curriculum and parent involvement.

In summary, although staff members in the SEAs we contacted take a real interest in evaluation and program improvement, other research strongly suggests that they spend relatively little time on these issues and that districts do not find SEA Chapter 1 offices especially helpful on matters of program quality. Because state officials are busy with the routine

administration of the program, they appreciate having TACs available to help with evaluation and program improvement.

How TACs Can Fill Gaps in State Capacity

By devoting at least part of an FTE to providing help in each state, the TACs significantly increase the total amount of expert staff time brought to bear on evaluation and improvement. Unlike many of the content experts on SEA Chapter 1 staffs, they are not responsible for ensuring compliance and can devote their full attention to assistance. And in fact a considerable share of the help they provide to states consists of acting as extensions of state staff. Coordinators in some states expressed their need and appreciation for the TACs in just these terms, saying, "[We need] more warm bodies," and "We're short of staff."

Although the TACs do contain experts in evaluation and program improvement, the level of expertise required to meet the bulk of state and local needs does not involve great technical sophistication. A state coordinator gave these examples of the technical issues the TAC helps address: "selecting test instruments, interpreting data, using the state test for Chapter 1 purposes"--none of which would pose a real challenge to an evaluation expert.

SEAs appreciate the TACs' contribution in developing the materials and procedures that SEAs use with their districts on issues of evaluation and improvement. For example, one TAC helped develop a manual on multiple uses of achievement test data. Another helped a state develop its criteria for assessing exemplary Chapter 1 programs, and still another participated in developing a self-assessment procedure that all districts in another state must use. The SEA coordinators expressed a wish for more developmental work of another kind from TACs--the identification or creation of "models" of

effective local Chapter 1 programs. Four of the nine state coordinators whom we interviewed said they want to know more about effective program models; two of these mentioned that they want models that are alternatives to pullout designs.

Something the TACs do not do much, but would like to do, is inservice training for SEA staff. In both evaluation and program improvement, inservice from the TACs could potentially bolster the knowledge and skills of SEA Chapter 1 staff. TAC staff members commented that they would like to conduct training on how to facilitate local program improvement--which this study, like that of Farrar and Millsap, confirms as an area of need in the SEA Chapter 1 offices.

Users at the Local Level

This discussion looks at the same issues as the preceding section but focuses on school districts.

Staff Capacity

Because local Chapter 1 programs vary so much in size and complexity, their staffing varies as well (Farrar & Millsap, 1986). The majority of participating school districts have programs small enough to be managed on a part-time basis by a coordinator who may be the superintendent, a principal, or a member of the central staff. Many other districts have one or two Chapter 1 FTEs in the district office, with various ways of dividing the responsibility for the regulatory and instructional aspects of the program. The largest districts have Chapter 1 programs with dozens of FTE staff members, including budget specialists, monitors, evaluators, and numerous instructional supervisors.

Across the approximately 14,000 school districts with Chapter 1 programs, the National Assessment estimated that the program's administrators include 3,625 FTE coordinators, 1,422 FTE curriculum specialists, 363 FTE evaluation specialists, and 349 FTE parent specialists. (District Chapter 1 offices also contain fiscal specialists, clerical personnel, and others.) Thus, although some large districts can oversee Chapter 1 with a number of people who are knowledgeable about evaluation and program improvement, most districts have few staff hours to devote to these matters.

District Activities

Like SEAs, district offices devote much of their Chapter 1 staff time to implementing required procedures and to creating and maintaining records that demonstrate compliance with the law. The mechanics of selecting schools and students, developing an application, preparing for monitoring visits, patrolling for violations of the supplement-not-supplant requirement, and filing reports all consume staff time. Also like SEAs, however, districts have staff members who try to attend to evaluation and program improvement.

Local evaluations, according to the National Assessment, continue to follow TIERS; about 90 percent of districts follow one of the Title I evaluation models and send their results to the state as often as before. The local use of evaluation results is more variable. There are cases in which the availability of program information directs attention to a problem and leads to program change. More commonly, though, Knapp et al. found that Chapter 1 coordinators think evaluation "has relatively little to do with the decisionmaking process" (1986). These researchers cite a typical

example of the local response to a state requirement concerning evaluation use:

> The state requires the district's application to include a narrative describing the way evaluation results have shaped this year's program. The Chapter 1 director writes that narrative but indicated that evaluation hasn't influenced any real decisions, because the "test results aren't that bad." (p. 46)

Knapp et al. observed that some local circumstances make the use of evaluation data more likely. These include the presence of local staff with evaluation expertise, large district size, central control over Chapter 1 decisions, attention to testing (e.g., due to a state testing program), pre-existing debate over particular program decisions, and commitment to information-based decisionmaking among top district leaders.

Although states vary in the extent to which they encourage evaluation use, Farrar and Millsap did not find that greater state efforts were associated with greater district use of evaluation. Like Knapp et al., they concluded that the determinants of evaluation use were primarily local.

While some districts are oriented to changing their Chapter 1 programs, others are not. Usually, the program looks very much the same from one year to the next (Knapp et al., 1986). Its stability comes in part from the normal inertia and adherence to standard operating procedures that characterize any organization, but also in part from the fact that Chapter 1 and Title I have a long history of regulations and monitoring. Once a local program meets with the approval of state Chapter 1 officials, local decisionmakers are sometimes reluctant to tamper with it. When a program does change, the factors that contribute to change may include evaluation results but may also reflect professional trends and state reform initiatives.

The influence of state reform initiatives is probably felt more strongly among local Chapter 1 staff than state Chapter 1 staff because these efforts, often spearheaded by a governor or chief state school officer, tend to bypass the federal program offices in an SEA. In the latest wave of school reform, new testing has led to the most noticeable local effects. Knapp et al. found instances of local decisionmakers significantly redirecting their Chapter 1 programs in an effort to improve scores on a state-mandated test: they have chosen to serve different grades, add a new subject, or undertake detailed revisions of the regular curriculum (which often drives the Chapter 1 curriculum) so that students will be better prepared for the test. Other types of state reform initiatives have also had effects. Some states' emphasis on school-based improvement has led to specific suggestions for coordinating Chapter 1 and the regular curriculum, for example.

How TACs Can Fill Gaps in Local Capacity

Unlike SEAs, school districts are simply too numerous to use TACs as a significant extension of their own staff. Our analysis suggests that the greatest potential benefit of TAC help for district staff is (1) having their attention directed to issues in evaluation or program improvement and (2) developing their own staff capacity to deal with these issues.

At the most routine level, the TACs can help districts by answering specific questions through telephone consultations or workshop presentations. When we asked the local Chapter 1 coordinators in a stratified random sample about help they had received from the TACs, most gave examples of this type of help. They remembered that the TACs had answered questions or helped them with a routine, often required, function. For example, one local coordinator had needed help filling out the state

form on sustained effects; after attending a TAC workshop, the coordinator knew how to fill out the form. Another received TAC help in filling out an application for the Secretary's Recognition Program but said that the district has its own inservice offerings and did not want other help with program improvement.

TAC staff told us about the process of bringing more extensive, substantive help to districts. In many cases, they said, the triggering event has to do with the local testing program. A district asks for help after updating the test ("some LEAs are using tests that are ten years old," said a TAC staff member) or changing to spring-to-spring testing. In the latter case, the reduction in apparent student gains brings requests for TAC help in interpreting the test data for the school board and parents.

Once a district begins to explore issues in evaluation and program improvement, the TAC can sometimes become an effective advocate for improvement simply by helping program staff see their options. A TAC staff member said:

> The new local directors are not sure where their power lies. For example, they don't know that more than pullout is possible, which you learn when you discuss program setting. They don't know that they don't have to have six Chapter 1 teachers at a certain school, even though it's always been done that way. You have to realize that Chapter 1 directors in smaller districts have little power relative to their principals.

TAC staff report that they find a void in Chapter 1 instructional leadership in a number of districts they work with. While district staff assume that principals are taking responsibility for the program, principals may consider Chapter 1 a centrally directed program that they are not supposed to influence. As a result, the Chapter 1 teachers and aides are left on their own to carry out the program.

Using Technical Assistance

When state and local Chapter 1 staff members want help, where do they turn? Our data and other analyses address these questions.

Sources of Assistance

For the SEA staff members we interviewed, the TACs are the chief source of technical assistance. Many SEA respondents also reported that they obtain help from regional laboratories and other offices within their own agencies. Other sources of assistance, mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents in this nonrepresentative sample, included local universities, state lobbyists in Washington, and Chapter 1 coordinators in other states.

For districts in this sample, the SEA is the major source of help. The assistance comes from the Chapter 1 office and other parts of the agency, such as the testing office. Several respondents mentioned receiving help directly from a TAC. Our analysis of the interview data also indicates that some of the respondents who cited SEA help had benefited either directly or indirectly from TAC help, such as a workshop under state auspices with presentations by TAC staff members or SEA presentations using TAC analyses. Other sources of help include other offices in the district, Chapter 1 offices in other districts, a regional lab, and professional associations.

The sources of help other than TACs, then, reflect the communication patterns commonly found within and between organizations: people talk with their colleagues in different offices of the same agency; they talk with their counterparts in other agencies; they keep up with professional associations; and they attend to vertical program networks (district staff ask SEA staff for information). Of the special-purpose assistance providers that the federal government supports, the TACs are the ones used most often within Chapter 1.

An SEA Cash Grant as an Alternative to TAC Assistance

Because ED wanted to know how SEAs would react to the idea of receiving a cash grant as an alternative to receiving TAC assistance, we asked them. Of the SEAs we interviewed, nearly all responded to this question by reiterating their satisfaction with TAC services. Several said that a cash grant would be a poor idea; one of them said that it would disrupt the valuable continuity of services that the TACs provide, while two pointed out that as federal contractors the TACs play a useful role as intermediaries between the SEAs and ED. Another SEA respondent said they would use a cash grant to hire the TAC staff, adding, "but don't give us the money. Any discretionary money ends up in the superintendent's office. We'd never be able to hire who we want or spend it the way we might want to."

Among the SEA respondents who were willing to entertain the idea of a cash grant, most said they would look for service providers like the TAC staff. They did not seem to have specific ideas about where to find such people. Their views were summed up by the answer, "We'd go out and get somebody to offer the same sort of thing." In one SEA, however, this question elicited a criticism and a clear alternative: "We could be much more selective in the people we would hire, you know, shop around for the right staff for us, not just take what's offered." This SEA would continue to use some evaluation help from the TAC but would hire more SEA staff and use some university-based consultants. However, at least among the nine SEAs in our sample, this was an uncommon point of view.

Conclusion

In assessing state and local needs for assistance in Chapter 1, the numbers alone tell a story. Staff levels are quite low, in both state and

local Chapter 1 offices, in relation to the challenges of evaluating and improving services in this large program. Perhaps even more important is the program's regulatory tradition, which dictates that substantial amounts of staff time and attention must go to maintaining compliance with legal requirements. Evaluation and improvement are not the central concerns of most Chapter 1 staff--although they command considerable respect as abstract notions. In this context, the expertise and availability of the TACs cannot help but make a welcome contribution.

Looking at the match between what TACs offer and what SEAs and districts want, we see that TAC staff play three different roles for the users of their services: a reference service, an extension of SEA staff, and a capacity builder.

- TAC staff act as a reference service for virtually all their clients, state and local. This is the least demanding role, in terms of time and skills, but it meets an important need for information. Whether the information is a summary of the latest research findings on effective instruction or descriptive data on available tests, both state and local clients value answers that are a telephone call away.

- Because the overall numbers of SEA staff who specialize in Chapter 1 evaluation or program content are so low (averaging about half an FTE in each area per state), the FTEs available from the TACs make a real difference. SEA staff recognize this, and they call on the TACs to fill in for them as providers of help to districts, as well as to develop materials and procedures they can disseminate.

- With local staff, TACs have been able to act as capacity builders when they and the district commit a reasonable amount of time to an intervention such as a workshop series. After participating in a workshop series, for example, school and district staff may be able to use evaluation data on a regular basis as they plan and monitor program improvements. At the same time, the TACs can help build capacity simply by virtue of serving as advocates for improvement--alerting local Chapter 1 coordinators and principals to the possibilities of change and improvement in what may be a stodgy, unexamined program.

- TACs have done somewhat less work in building SEA capacity, although our data suggest that this would be a worthwhile endeavor. We elaborate on this subject, as well as our other findings on the effectiveness of TAC services, in the next chapters of this report.

4. Effects of TAC Services

This chapter examines evidence on the effectiveness of TAC services, based on SEA and LEA reports from our interviews and the assessments voiced by TAC staff. The discussion begins with an analysis of users' satisfaction with the TACs and then analyzes the results of TAC services.

Users' Satisfaction with the TACs

Technical assistance is delivered by people to people, so the personal relationships established between TAC staff and their clients are important influences on the effectiveness of the services they provide. In fact, TAC staff find that they are in a much better position than federal or state assistance givers because they are not identified with compliance monitoring or program judgments. The fact that SEA and LEA staff view the TACs as a trusted source of information is an important component of their ability to be effective.

We were struck by the glowing comments offered by SEA Chapter 1 coordinators and evaluators in our telephone interviews. Noting the high number of projects identified by the Secretary's Recognition Program and significant achievement gains of their projects, one SEA director said, "These successful gains are a result of the inservice received from the TAC and the hands-on relationship with our clients." Other comments, each from a different state, included:

> "The [TAC] assistance is always exemplary and supportive."
>
> "All TAC assistance is useful. The state could not do without their services and could benefit from increased services."

"Our TAC is trustworthy and does quality work. Everything the TAC has been doing is significantly helpful."

"[TAC is] highly qualified and does a great job."

Effects of the TACs' Assistance in Evaluation

TAC and SEA staff report that TAC assistance has resulted in the successful adoption and implementation of TIERS. Because assisting in the implementation of TIERS was the TACs' initial purpose, this result is an important success for the TAC program. However, TAC staff believe that the quality of TIERS data would decline significantly if the TACs disappeared. In the opinion of TAC staff, SEAs would continue to require LEAs to report TIERS data, but they would not exercise much leadership in the process nor would they provide technical assistance or monitor data quality.

Responses from state Chapter 1 staff suggest that the quality of TIERS data continues to vary across states, depending upon the degree of automation of the SEA's system, the relationship between the SEA and its LEAs, and the rate of turnover of state and local Chapter 1 staff. Even so, both SEAs and the TACs themselves agree that TACs have helped improve the quality of state-level data. They have done so by helping to implement or upgrade quality control procedures, including automated systems, that SEAs use in entering and editing LEA data. TAC assistance has also significantly strengthened procedures for analyzing state-level data and reporting them to ED.

The effects of TAC assistance on the quality of the data that LEAs submit to their SEAs are less dramatic, largely because of the sheer number of LEAs. As an SEA Chapter 1 coordinator in a small state said, "There are not enough TAC resources to provide services to every district on a regular basis." While LEAs are now much more careful about meeting the technical

requirements of TIERS (e.g., testing near the norming dates, using different test results for Chapter 1 student selection and TIERS pretests), other methods for improving the quality of district-level TIERS data (e.g., matching tests to curricula, administering tests properly, recording data accurately) require more TAC contact with LEAs than is currently feasible. Because TACs are often their only source of Chapter 1 evaluation expertise, small districts have probably derived more benefit from TAC help than larger districts that employ evaluators.

In spite of improvements in data quality, TACs expressed some skepticism about the value of TIERS data beyond its political role in Washington. They noted that TIERS results have remained stable over the years and thus contain little new information on program effectiveness. Moreover, when data are subjected to careful longitudinal analyses, short-term gains tend to vanish. Despite this skepticism, TACs view the political role of TIERS as critically important in preserving Chapter 1, mainly because TIERS has performed a national accountability function for the program. TACs also believe strongly in the importance of good evaluation data as a starting point for program improvement. In fact, TAC staff believe that their assistance in improving evaluation data has made the move to program improvement feasible.

Effects of TACs' Assistance in Program Improvement

Although TAC staff do not systematically track the effects of their program improvement efforts, they believe that their assistance in this area has had a positive impact. They noted, however, that it is much harder to detect effects in program improvement than in evaluation. When TAC staff help an SEA prepare an evaluation report or automate a data system, they can

see the results. It takes much longer to discern the results of program improvement assistance because the intended changes are much more deeply embedded in the educational process. Even so, we obtained several examples of the effects of TAC assistance in program improvement.

Increased Awareness of Relevant Research Findings

The TACs' dissemination of research on effective schools and classrooms is a useful component of TAC assistance in two respects. First, it is a valuable service by itself, especially for smaller or more isolated districts whose staff are sometimes unaware of alternatives to current Chapter 1 instructional arrangements, and SEAs that serve such districts. Even in other SEAs and in large LEAs, Chapter 1 coordinators consider their increased knowledge of research to be an important result of TAC assistance because it helps them perform their jobs better. Second, the TACs' familiarity with recent research serves to legitimize them in the eyes of assistance users and thus helps pave the way for other assistance. One Chapter 1 state coordinator said that the TAC's "assistance is current and reliable; [TAC staff] synthesize a lot of information and are up to date on the research," which is reflected in the high quality of their assistance. A local Chapter 1 coordinator said that the best feature of the TAC's assistance is "the expertise that the consultants have and their use of available research in reading and evaluation."

Increased Use of Evaluation Results

TAC staff reported that program improvement assistance has increased local interest in evaluation issues because the assistance draws direct connections between evaluation results and Chapter 1 programs. As one state Chapter 1 coordinator reported, the process of designing program improvement strategies highlights, in particular, the possible uses of evaluation data

on sustained effects, since these data indicate where improvement is needed most. Because the TACs employ evaluation as the first step in designing improvement strategies, assistance recipients can readily see the link between evaluation and improvement.

One LEA respondent reported that, as a result of TAC assistance, "our new approach is that all teachers must know how and plan to meet students' needs [using evaluation results]. We have learned how to take evaluation data and plot [them] in a meaningful way, so that people can understand [them]."

Greater Coordination between Chapter 1 and Other Staff

TAC staff said that one positive effect of the workshops is simply the fact that they bring together people who have responsibility for Chapter 1 services in a school or LEA. TAC staff said some local Chapter 1 coordinators have not met the principals of some of their districts' Chapter 1 schools who, in turn, have not assumed any responsibility for the quality of the Chapter 1 program. Similarly, Chapter 1 and regular teachers may not have worked together.

These experiences are particularly valuable given the importance TACs (and others) place on improving instructional coordination between Chapter 1 and regular classroom instruction. Several Chapter 1 coordinators whom we interviewed said that their program improvement efforts revealed how important it was both to integrate Chapter 1 and regular instruction and also to improve the regular school program.

In addition to the value of these interactions, regional workshop participants also appreciate the opportunity to meet and learn from their counterparts in other districts, according to TAC staff.

Improved Student Performance

Specific examples of student effects were difficult to obtain, due to the length of time required for project changes to result in higher achievement scores. Even so, TAC staff cited a few examples of improvements in achievement. One district totally overhauled its Chapter 1 program design as result of the TAC workshop series and later reported increases in student achievement, which it attributed to TAC help. An SEA conducted improvement training using the TAC model and reported that the recipient district showed achievement gains as a result.

Our calls to LEAs produced two reports of improved student performance:

- As a result of TAC help, Chapter 1 staff now see "where time on task increased and the changes [resulted in] student growth."
- Due to TAC assistance, "there has been positive growth in three of four schools, based on a look at achievement gains prior to the project and after the project year. There are also achievement gains in comparing project students with similar students."

General SEA and LEA Responses to Improvement Assistance

LEAs tend to be more receptive than SEAs to changes intended to promote program improvement. According to TAC staff, LEA feedback during and after the workshops is very positive, with some districts asking to participate in more workshops. TAC staff see growing support from SEAs, which they attribute to interest sparked by the nationwide educational reform movement, the Secretary's Recognition Program, and satisfied LEA participants in the TAC workshops and consultations. This support is visible in several developments. Some SEAs now want to specify the number of improvement workshops in their letters of agreement. One state has contracted to pay for 12 improvement workshops over and above those provided under the TAC contract.

In addition to support for the TACs' assistance in program improvement, SEA respondents give high ratings to the TAC improvement-related products with which they are familiar. These include workshop materials, research syntheses on characteristics of effective programs, and the "In Their Own Words" series.

Across all our SEA respondents, the main complaint about TAC services is that they do not get as much as they would like. As one SEA respondent said, "TAC service is excellent and needed; we could use all the help we can get."

Only one SEA expressed displeasure with TAC assistance in program improvement. This SEA found the evaluation assistance to be extremely useful but implied that the improvement assistance was too simplistic. The state Chapter 1 coordinator said, "I'm not too happy with the people from the TAC. Now we refuse to have one person come here. We need [program improvement] assistance from people who can really understand districts and adjust to their needs, not just give a canned response." After interviews with the TAC, we believe that this view reflects (1) a high level of program sophistication on the part of this SEA respondent and (2) a TAC staff member who is not skilled in the delivery of program improvement assistance.

Other Effects of TAC Assistance

SEAs recognize the role that TACs play in communicating ED priorities in program improvement and evaluation. One SEA coordinator said that the TAC serves as a liaison between the SEA and ED and between the SEA and the state's LEAs; he said this is a valuable service and that he would not want to lose it. Another SEA Chapter 1 coordinator referred to the TAC as "an intermediary between the state and ED," which should be maintained.

Conclusion

Despite variations among TACs, we find that the TACs in general are achieving results commensurate with their efforts in evaluation and program improvement assistance. The most important of these results may be the interest and enthusiasm they generate among local Chapter 1 personnel. Interactions with TAC staff seem to help LEA staff see new possibilities in the instructional services they provide and in the results that their students are capable of achieving.

Given the very large number of Chapter 1 LEAs and the small size of the TAC program, the positive effects of TAC services will be limited to only a few LEA recipients unless SEAs can be enlisted to participate more meaningfully in program improvement assistance. SEA Chapter 1 offices are the logical entities for this work because they know the Chapter 1 program and the characteristics of the projects in their states. What they may lack is expertise in program improvement and technical assistance. To help them acquire it, they need to learn from the TACs and the TACs need to push them to learn. This role would not preclude current TAC services, but it would cause TACs and SEAs to place more emphasis on TAC efforts to build SEA capacity as assistance providers and advocates for improvement.

5. The TACs and ED

In this chapter we examine ED's relationship with the TACs from several perspectives, including (1) the events and trends that have determined federal expectations for the TACs, (2) the administrative decisions and procedures that are instrumental in implementing the TAC program, and (3) the special circumstances affecting technical assistance to Chapter 1's state-operated programs for migrant students and neglected or delinquent students. The chapter concludes by identifying several key results of ED's administrative directions to the TACs.

Impact of the Larger Chapter 1 Program on the TACs

Because the TACs exist to advance broad goals of accountability and effectiveness in Chapter 1, actions and decisions in other parts of the Chapter 1 program influence the TACs. The most important of these are reviewed below.

Changes in Chapter 1's Statutory Provisions

Although OE established the TACs in response to statutory directions in 1974, ECIA included no similar authorization. Yet, even though the 1981 law dropped the statutory requirements for the TACs and the evaluation models, ED personnel continued to (1) urge states to collect and report Chapter 1 evaluation data using the models and (2) provide support through the TACs to help in these activities. These policies found support among influential groups such as the Chapter 1 state coordinators, who agreed with ED that the new law would not reduce congressional interest in monitoring Chapter 1's effectiveness (Reisner & Marks, 1987).

Despite these efforts to ensure continuity, however, the absence of a legislative requirement to implement uniform evaluation models has affected the work of the TACs. Most obviously, the shift resulted in a drop in the number of states submitting comparable Chapter 1 achievement data (from a high of 53 SEAs in 1980 to 46 SEAs most recently). On the other hand, a more subtle--and generally positive--change is that, without the legal requirement to implement TIERS, ED had to appeal for voluntary implementation on the basis of the system's value to SEAs and LEAs. Our analysis indicates that this shift helped in some places to change Chapter 1 evaluation from a compliance responsibility to an activity conducted mainly to generate program information for state and local purposes.

A second legislative change affecting the TACs was the reduction in the Chapter 1 set-aside for SEA administration. ECIA reduced the set-aside from the equivalent of 1.5 percent of a state's Title I allocation to 1.0 percent. According to Farrar and Millsap (1986), many SEAs responded to the reduction by reassigning staff who had been responsible for Chapter 1 evaluation and instructional issues. Typical rationales were that (1) assistance was available in these areas from the TACs, so that SEA-level expertise was not essential, and (2) less Chapter 1 evaluation would be needed without the legislative requirement for TIERS. Not surprisingly, these decisions increased the demands on TAC staff.

Changes in Chapter 1 Spending

Federal appropriations for Title I and Chapter 1 have zigged and zagged in response to various policies of cutback and expansion in federal education spending, but TAC spending has not paralleled these changes in overall Title I/Chapter 1 funding levels. In the first six years of TAC operations, TAC funding grew faster than the overall growth in Title I

funding, as seen in Table 3. Since enactment of ECIA, however, TAC funding has declined as a percentage of overall Chapter 1 appropriations, despite fluctuations in the total appropriations level.

Table 3

ED Spending on Compensatory Education and the TACs, 1976-77 through 1987-88

School Year	TAC Funds	Total Title 1/ Chapter 1 Funds	TAC Funds as Percent of Total
1976-77	$1,590,845	$2,050,000,000	0.08
1977-78	4,087,644	2,285,000,000	0.18
1978-79	5,297,119	2,735,000,000	0.19
1979-80	6,648,639	3,228,382,000	0.21
1980-81	8,508,050	3,215,343,000	0.26
1981-82	8,260,388	3,104,317,000	0.27
1982-83	5,286,232	3,033,969,000	0.17
1983-84	5,596,979	3,200,394,000	0.17
1984-85	4,170,000	3,480,000,000	0.12
1985-86	3,625,000	3,688,163,000	0.10
1986-87	3,600,000	3,529,572,000	0.10
1987-88	3,600,000	3,944,163,000	0.09

Sources: Interviews with ED Budget Service; Reisner & Marks, 1987.

According to ED analysts interviewed for this study, the decline in TAC funding after 1981-82, relative to overall Chapter 1 funding, reflects a belief that the TACs have achieved their main purpose, which was to help SEAs and LEAs implement Chapter 1 evaluation systems. The relative decline also reflects the demands of other Chapter 1 evaluation activities. The most important of these in recent years have been the studies conducted for the National Assessment of Chapter 1, mandated in the 1983 technical amendments to Chapter 1.

In addition, federal fiscal actions in education have affected the TACs in another area--ED staffing of the Chapter 1 program office and the Department's evaluation office. As a result of personnel policies implemented in 1981, the office with primary responsibility for administering Chapter 1, the Compensatory Education Programs (CEP) office, experienced large reductions in total staffing, dropping from 95 staff members in April 1981 to 51 in December 1986 (Funkhouser, Michie, & Moore, 1987). Reductions were especially large among staff assigned to provide technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs; according to Funkhouser et al., ED eliminated Chapter 1 specialist positions in parent involvement, needs assessment, basic skills, school selection, and neglected or delinquent services. During the period one new position was added to work on program improvement issues. The net effect was to cut back CEP's activities in areas relevant to the work of the TACs.

Comparable figures are not available on staff members assigned to Chapter 1 activities in ED's Planning and Evaluation Service (PES), the office that administers the TAC contracts. Respondents in that office estimate, however, that the staff assigned to TAC-related activities dropped from 3.0 FTE staff in 1978 to 0.2 FTE in 1987.

Cutbacks in the two offices have meant that less staff time is available for working with the TACs and for dealing with technical assistance issues generally. This is most obvious in reduced staff resources available for monitoring the TACs' activities. A related effect is the lack of personnel to communicate ED's expectations in Chapter 1 evaluation and program improvement to the states. According to the state Chapter 1 coordinators we interviewed, this deficiency has meant that SEAs generally rely on the TACs for information on ED policies in these areas.

Because the TACs are often called on to explain ED initiatives and directions, TAC directors say that it is essential for them to know what ED expects from educational agencies in evaluation and program improvement.

Growing Importance of Educational Quality Issues in Chapter 1

The value of good communication between ED and the TACs has been shown in the implementation of the Chapter 1 program improvement initiative. Due to a shortage of Chapter 1 discretionary funds and staff resources, ED called on the TACs to help publicize and implement the initiative, particularly the Secretary's Recognition Program for Chapter 1 projects. According to CEP staff, TAC help was crucial in spreading word of the initiative among their constituencies and in helping inform SEAs and LEAs about the Recognition Program's selection criteria and its application and selection process.

The TACs welcomed this new responsibility. It came along just as SEAs and LEAs were mastering the TIERS requirements and as ED was directing the TACs to assist educational agencies in using evaluation data for program improvement. The federal initiative helped focus state and local attention on the new TAC mission and, according to one TAC director, prompted some projects to begin thinking about how to use evaluation results to improve Chapter 1 instruction.

The results of ED's educational quality emphasis in Chapter 1 are seen in reports on the allocation of TAC resources. In the year ended September 30, 1987, the TACs reported that 55 percent of their staff time devoted to direct services went to program improvement activities, as contrasted with evaluation-related services, which required 45 percent of their time. This allocation is consistent with the requirement in current TAC contracts that TACs "reserve approximately 50 percent of their professional time for

program improvement activities" (p. 40 of the 1985 Request for Proposals [RFP]).

Continuing Importance of Compliance as Chapter 1's Main Administrative Priority

The program improvement initiative has not, however, altered ED's chief administrative priority under Chapter 1. According to Funkhouser et al. (1987), almost all of CEP's staff positions are assigned to compliance-related activities, including policy interpretation and development activities (e.g., preparation of guidelines and directives), compliance monitoring, and grants administration. The staff reductions of the 1980s did not change these responsibilities but only reduced the number of employees available to implement them.

From the TACs' point of view, CEP's compliance focus has meant that the TACs are the only Chapter 1 assistance source for SEAs and LEAs needing help in instructional quality or evaluation. Of the SEA and LEA coordinators interviewed for this study, only one reported having ever obtained any Chapter 1 technical assistance in evaluation or program improvement from ED. Indeed, as one TAC staffer said, educational agencies would not take an instruction- or evaluation-related problem to CEP (even if they thought CEP possessed the relevant expertise) because they would be afraid their inquiry might prompt a compliance review.

Impact of the Procedures Used To Administer the TACs

The specific policies and procedures used in administering the TACs also contribute to the relationship between the TACs and ED. The most important of these are discussed below.

Reliance on the Contracting Process

Since initiation of the TAC program, OE and then ED have used competitive contracts as the basis for administering the TACs. Given the limits on federal hiring, federal administrative rules, and the popularity of the TACs among users, no one seriously suggests that the alternatives to this funding vehicle (e.g., creation of a pool of federal consultants to provide technical assistance, special funding for states to procure assistance directly, use of a less confining vehicle such as grants) are preferable to contracts. Even so, the use of contracts has several negative effects, as described below.

Priority on competition. While desirable in most respects, the competitive process creates two problems. First, the process itself (e.g., developing an RFP, reviewing proposals, convening selection panels, negotiating contracts) is so time-consuming that it uses a very large portion of total ED staff resources available for administering the TACs. As a result, ED staff have little time left for monitoring TAC operations or for contact with TAC users. A second problem that competition creates is that, according to at least one TAC director, the knowledge that they may soon be competing against one another for a TAC contract tends to discourage collaboration among TAC offices, including collaboration between the TAC prime contractors and subcontractors.

Excessive federal control over TAC hiring. A key benefit of using contracts to operate the TACs is that they allow ED to purchase exactly the services and personnel that are desired and no more. Because the contract selection and monitoring processes impose no specific limits on federal control, however, federal oversight can go too far, as several TAC directors described in connection with TAC hiring. One director said that his

organization's recruitment activities had been hampered because of unreasonable salary limits PES imposes on new hires. Another TAC director complained that PES exerts pressure to fill TAC vacancies with evaluation specialists, while CEP expects the TACs to hire educational improvement experts. This director felt it was not possible to please both offices. These directors said that ED should set broad standards for TAC staff qualifications but should delegate recruitment and hiring decisions to the TAC directors.

A second area in which ED exerts substantial and perhaps excessive control is in TAC activities intended to improve the Centers' capacity to deliver technical assistance. Current TAC contracts require ED's advance approval for the following TAC activities (p. 42 of the 1985 RFP) among others:

- Developing "compilations of information on successful projects and strategies or literature reviews."
- "Serving on committees to review materials produced, advise on evaluation designs, or provide expert opinion on topics related to specific new initiatives."
- "Developing materials that can be used across TACs," such as computer software, workshop materials, and handbooks.

Although ED's advance approval helps ensure that TACs do not duplicate each other's efforts in these areas, the requirement for approval deters TACs from conducting these capacity building activities. By simply requiring TACs to coordinate with each other on these activities, ED could minimize duplication of effort, while also encouraging greater collaboration across TACs. (On the other hand, by shifting ED's approval to the review of TAC products, ED would encourage rigorous quality control, rather than just serving as a gatekeeper.)

Scheduling rigidity. TAC contracts are awarded for one year plus two option years. ED reviews each TAC's performance before exercising its options to continue the contract for the second and third years. We found this arrangement to be reasonable except when the contracting cycle is not consistent with the timing of Chapter 1 policy changes, as will soon occur. Because the current TAC contracts expire in September 1988, ED is currently preparing to select new TAC contractors to start work in October 1988. To do so, the Department had to prepare specifications for its RFP before the Congress (1) resolved differences in the elementary and secondary reauthorization bills passed in the two Houses and (2) voted appropriations for the resulting legislation. Because the law contains important changes affecting the TACs (e.g., local requirements to identify and improve ineffective project services, an ED requirement to fund Chapter 1 rural assistance centers), ED may find that its next TAC contracts do not address the needs that new Chapter 1 provisions and regulations will generate. Because there is so little flexibility in the contracting process, however, ED was forced to adhere to a schedule that required TAC design decisions to be made before the new law was passed and appropriations approved.

Technical Control by the Evaluation Office

As indicated above, CEP and PES differ on certain aspects of TAC administration, most notably how TACs should be staffed. Nevertheless, respondents for this study indicated general satisfaction with the current administrative arrangement, in which PES provides technical direction for the TAC contracts and CEP (1) maintains contact with the TACs (e.g., by including the TACs in all general mailings to SEAs and LEAs and attending the TAC directors' meetings in Washington), (2) participates in the selection of TAC contractors, and (3) stays in contact with PES on matters

affecting the TACs. Senior CEP staff would like to have a written agreement with PES spelling out each office's responsibilities and prerogatives in administering the TACs. PES expressed no interest in such an agreement.

Use of Quantitative Reporting Formats

The first TAC evaluation (Millman et al., 1979) recommended that OE require the TACs to implement a uniform system of cost and effort reporting. That recommendation was accepted, and TAC contracts since then have included requirements for reporting on TAC activities and expenditures.

In this evaluation we reviewed several data reporting formats used by the TACs, as follows:

- Record of TAC hours and expenditures by contract task

  This format requires monthly reports of TAC effort (in hours per named staff member) and spending in each of the eight tasks included in the TAC contracts. It thus permits analyses of labor and other expenditures in the context of specific TAC activities. Because it is a standard reporting requirement for federal contractors, the organizations operating TAC contracts use it frequently and incur little expense in maintaining it. This was by far the most useful quantitative format analyzed for this evaluation.

  Its main drawback is that the current tasks mix very broad activities, where effort and expense are high (e.g., technical consulting in program improvement), with narrow activities requiring little effort or expense (e.g., TAC directors' meetings).

- Record of topics on which technical assistance is provided

  This format breaks down the effort expended under Task 2 of the TAC contracts (technical consulting services) into subcategories such as data quality control, microcomputer/technology, and testing issues. Because actual services almost always span several categories, TAC personnel must make arbitrary classifications or report activities under more than one heading.

- Record of TAC contact hours

  This format counts the total hours of TAC service that SEA and LEA personnel receive through workshops, on-site consultations, telephone calls, and letters. Thus, a 30-minute presentation to 40 Chapter 1 coordinators at a state Chapter 1 conference yields 20 contact hours, as do two five-hour days working with one

district's Chapter 1 coordinator and assistant superintendent for instruction. The chief problem with this format is that a contact hour is not a particularly useful measure of TAC service as discussed in the second chapter of this report, since in-depth consultations or workshops with a few decisionmakers are more likely to produce lasting improvements in Chapter 1 services than are briefer, more superficial contacts with large groups.

- Narrative descriptions of TAC activities

  TACs submit both quarterly and annual reports of their activities, including a separate quarterly report devoted to program improvement. The content of these reports varies across TACs, though all include both quantitative and narrative reports. In our view the most useful data presented in the reports are the state summaries, which are usually presented only in the annual reports. Because TAC services are so closely tied to the special circumstances and needs of individual states, it is much more valuable for an ED monitor to see how TAC services relate to the needs and characteristics of a particular state than to examine an overview of TAC services provided across several states.

  Current TAC narrative reports also include information that is not useful at all, such as overviews of the history and mission of the TAC program or of Title I and Chapter 1.

Our review of TAC reports helped confirm what we learned from the TACs and from state and local respondents about the mix of (1) direct services to SEAs and LEAs and (2) TAC capacity building activities, such as materials development and training of TAC staff. The current TAC focus on direct services seems to leave very little room for building internal capacity. All of the requirements and incentives built into the TAC program encourage the services focus, from the requirement for ED permission to develop materials (as stated in current contracts) to the reporting formats that ask only for data on the content and delivery system for direct services. This policy is understandable, given the small size of current TAC budgets and the high demand for TAC service, but in general it forces the TACs to rely on expertise and materials developed elsewhere. In particular, it may create special problems as TACs begin to address complex assessment and improvement problems, such as those likely to be prompted by legislative

provisions requiring LEAs to identify and assist ineffective Chapter 1 schools.

The Special Circumstances Posed for the TACs by Chapter 1's State-Operated Programs

Although not spelled out in the current TAC contracts, one expectation ED holds for TACs is that they will provide evaluation and program improvement services needed by Chapter 1 migrant education and neglected or delinquent projects. Operated directly by SEAs, these two program areas generate demands for technical assistance services that differ substantially from those arising in connection with Chapter 1 basic grants. Because of these differences, the fit between the services these two programs need and those that TACs typically provide is poor.

In evaluation, for example, the centerpiece of TAC assistance is TIERS, which relies on standardized tests of Chapter 1 participants at 12-month intervals. TIERS is difficult to implement in migrant education because some students move in and out of projects on schedules that do not conform to local testing cycles. Moreover, migrant students may require tests in languages other than English (such as Portuguese and Haitian-Creole), for which national norms may not be available. In neglected or delinquent education, students are also likely to enter and exit Chapter 1 projects without much notice, precluding pre- and post-testing.

Because of the unique characteristics of projects in these areas, program improvement strategies that are effective in regular LEA projects (e.g., improving the continuity of skills development activities across grades, providing follow-up services to students who have "graduated" from Chapter 1) may be impossible.

In addition to these problems, organizational issues often separate migrant and neglected or delinquent services from Chapter 1 basic grant serv ces. For example, ED's Migrant Education Program office is separate from CEP. States with large migrant populations also sometimes administer migrant education in different offices from the Chapter 1 basic grant program. Although the federal Chapter 1 neglected or delinquent program is administered in CEP, at the state level the program is usually administered in the department of corrections. As a result of these organizational arrangements, Chapter 1 migrant education and neglected or delinquent programs often have poor links to the basic grant program and thus to the main users of TAC services.

Although TACs occasionally work with Chapter 1 migrant programs and more infrequently work with neglected or delinquent programs, the TACs are not generally well equipped to provide services to these projects. Given their special needs and organizational arrangements, it seems unlikely that the TACs will be able to devote much attention to these areas, unless ED specially designates them as priorities--either for all the TACs or for one or two TACs assigned to maintain the special necessary expertise.

Results of ED's Administrative Direction of the TACs

The preceding discussion highlights several effects of the current relationship between ED and the TACs. In anticipating changes in the demands made on the TAC program, we conclude that three effects are particularly relevant:

- Current TAC requirements and incentives place low priority on the development of expertise or materials specially tailored to the needs of TAC users.

  This priority is conveyed in (1) the TAC contracts themselves, which require special permission for most internal capacity

building activities, and (2) the TAC reporting requirements, which focus on direct services. As a result, TACs must rely on expertise and materials developed by other, non-Chapter 1 sources. Because these sources provide expertise and materials that are highly relevant to Chapter 1, we find this to be a reasonable strategy in most circumstances. However, it means that TACs have few resources for dealing with special user needs or ED priorities.

- Few incentives or opportunities exist to encourage information-sharing or collaboration across TACs.

  The competition built into the relationship among TACs and the lack of specific authorization for collaboration in the TAC contracts discourage the TACs from sharing successful approaches to service delivery. Because the TAC directors' meetings are mainly used for communication between the TACs and ED, they do not adequately address the need for sharing across TACs.

- Current federal monitoring procedures do not encourage TACs to engage in the kinds of in-depth consultation and sustained involvement that are most likely to produce lasting improvement in Chapter 1 services.

  Given the complexity and uniqueness of most program improvement needs and the growing importance of these needs among all those that TACs address, the TACs' current reporting requirements are inappropriate. Since ED must rely on written reports for its monitoring of TAC activities (due to shortages of personnel and travel funds), it should revise current reporting requirements to highlight (1) state-by-state discussions of Chapter 1 evaluation and program improvement needs, TAC services, results, and projected needs and (2) time and resource expenditures by TAC activity category.

6. Alternatives for Change in the TAC Program

Preceding chapters have described the operations and effects of the TACs, including their interactions with SEAs, LEAs, and ED. Based on the information and analyses presented in those chapters and on analyses of needs arising from new legislation, we have identified several areas in which ED might consider modifying the current TAC program. These are presented in this chapter.

The suggested changes are premised on our conclusion that ED should continue the TAC program. Because any recommendations on TAC funding levels must consider how funds would be spent if they were not used for TACs, we make no suggestions regarding funding levels for TAC services.

Possible Changes in the Structure of the TAC Program

The changes described in this section address the mission of the TACs and their organization for the delivery of technical assistance services.

1. Redirect the TACs towards a mission of increasing SEAs' capacity to promote and implement Chapter 1 improvement.

As discussed in preceding chapters, TACs play three main roles in serving SEAs and LEAs; these include serving as (1) sources for information, especially in evaluation and testing, (2) extensions of SEA staff, and (3) advocates of improvement in Chapter 1 programs. We suggest that ED push TACs to enlarge their role as improvement advocates and capacity builders in Chapter 1 program improvement and evaluation. This role takes advantage of skills that TACs possess (and that SEAs and LEAs perceive TACs to possess) and encourages TACs to use these skills in the most efficient way possible, which is to strengthen the ability of SEAs to promote improvement and effective evaluation in Chapter 1 programs.

Because SEAs learn about TAC resources through their services as extensions of SEA staff and information sources, ED could allow TACs to continue these roles as is needed to build relationships with SEAs and LEAs. However, the TACs could be directed to reduce the amount of service they provide as extensions of SEA staff and to increase the more substantive services they provide in strengthening SEA capacities. This change will require many SEAs to modify their relationships with TACs by, for example, increasing their participation in and understanding of the improvement strategies that TACs promote through workshops and consultations.

2. Assign special areas of responsibility to some TACs.

Discussions in preceding chapters note that the TACs have little opportunity to develop either special expertise or tailored materials for technical assistance activities due to pressures to deliver direct services to SEAs and LEAs. In general, these pressures have yielded positive outcomes, including a relatively high level of TAC service to users. The focus on direct service has meant, however, that the TACs are not particularly well equipped to respond to new priorities arising at the national level.

Based on this suggestion, the next TAC RFP could designate a few special priority areas and allow each bidder to propose an approach and budget for providing extra services in that area, if desired. Extra services would consist of (1) developing materials for all the TACs to use and (2) providing special expertise and advice to other TACs as they plan services in the area. TAC contractors selected to provide services in a priority area could receive extra resources for that purpose.

Based on analysis of new legislation and other information, we have identified the following as possible areas for designation as special priorities:

- Parent involvement in Chapter 1,
- Coordination of Chapter 1 and regular instruction,
- Preschool education,
- Chapter 1 instruction in higher order skills,
- Services to migrant students,
- Services to neglected or delinquent students, and
- Methods of evaluating and improving the delivery of technical assistance.

3. Establish minimum levels of effort for TAC offices.

Based on our own analyses and on observations by CEP respondents, we believe that very small TAC offices are inefficient. For example, current evidence suggests that each office needs a specialist in data base development; smaller offices, however, may not be able to use that person's time efficiently. To avoid the creation of very small offices, ED could consider requiring at least 4.5 FTE staff per TAC office. (The smallest office at present is staffed with 3.1 FTE.) This minimum would be particularly important if ED decides to change the number or boundaries of the TAC regions because it would prevent bidders from proposing field offices with very small staffs.

Alternatively, ED might designate a minimum number of states to be served by a TAC office. At present no office serves fewer than four states, a level that could be established as a national minimum.

Possible Changes in the General Responsibilities of the TACs

The following suggestions concern the work and methods of the TACs.

4. Require TACs to evaluate their technical assistance services and to use evaluation data to improve their service capacities.

TACs do not currently evaluate their own activities. As a result, they obtain no systematic feedback on the suitability or effectiveness of their services. To remedy this surprising gap, we suggest that ED direct the TACs to conduct both formative and summative evaluations of their activities. The TACs' formative evaluations could be designed to assess the services they provide in light of what their clients need. It could be measured on a state by state basis, utilizing a continuous log of each state's major service needs (both as reported by the state and as perceived by TAC staff) and TAC services to the state's SEA and LEAs. As services are provided, the TAC staff could assess them to determine whether they addressed major needs or whether they simply assisted the state in meeting its ongoing Chapter 1 obligations. When the TAC determined that services were too heavily weighted towards meeting ongoing obligations, it could redirect the services towards activities likely to promote lasting improvement in the state's Chapter 1 programs. (We understand that such changes would need to be worked out with the SEA.)

TAC staff could conduct summative evaluations of their services through systematic questions (asked orally or in writing) of service recipients, in order to determine whether service recipients applied what they had learned from the TAC. With at least a sample of these recipients, TAC staff could ask follow-up questions at several points in time (e.g., immediately after the service, six months later, one year later) to identify changes planned or made as a result of the TAC service.

The TAC could then use the results of these evaluation activities to modify TAC services, in order to make them more effective in promoting

Chapter 1 improvement and increasing the capacity of SEAs to act as improvement resources for the LEAs of their states.

5. Increase TAC capacity to assist in developing student- and school-level data bases.

New legislative requirements as well as current SEA demands indicate the growing importance of state-wide Chapter 1 data bases that can track the participation and performance of Chapter 1 beneficiaries. Requirements to assess school-level Chapter 1 performance, for example, will require LEAs to disaggregate and regroup project-level data to the school level. In addition, some states have already requested and received TAC help in designing student-level data bases to meet their own needs for tracking the participation and performance of low achieving students in Chapter 1 and state compensatory education programs; most of these data bases have been designed for use on microcomputers.

Although several TAC offices have already developed this technical assistance capacity, anticipated growth in demand suggests that (1) this capacity be made an explicit part of the TACs' responsibilities in evaluation and (2) TACs be encouraged to share the software they develop or adapt for this purpose.

6. Increase TAC capacity to assist in coordinating Chapter 1 evaluation and program improvement with state testing and improvement initiatives.

Many states have recently adopted extensive new testing programs and improvement initiatives as part of state educational reform programs; other states are reviewing such proposals or planning for their implementation in the near future. Often, however, the state initiatives are not planned to coordinate with either (1) testing programs for evaluating Chapter 1 services or (2) improvements needed in Chapter 1 programs. We know that the need for such coordination is growing as, for example, SEAs and LEAs become

concerned about (1) the amount of achievement testing occurring in many classrooms and (2) the exclusion of compensatory education programs from the implementation of some improvement initiatives. To help meet SEA and LEA needs, ED could require TACs to possess the capacity for assisting educational agencies in these areas.

7. Conduct a series of TAC seminars on technical assistance issues.

As discussed in preceding chapters, TACs have little opportunity or incentive to share information and successful approaches among themselves. To encourage greater sharing, ED could authorize the TACs to conduct periodic seminars on topics of major importance to all the TACs. A TAC with particular expertise or interests in the subject would organize and host each seminar, and TAC staff and others (e.g., SEA and LEA experts, researchers) could make presentations and lead discussions. Given the amount of effort required for each seminar, one per year would be sufficient. To ensure that other topics do not crowd out the main purpose of the seminar, we suggest that the seminars be held outside Washington.

Possible seminar topics include:

- Reading instruction in Chapter 1 projects,
- Integrating Chapter 1 testing with state testing programs, and
- Microcomputer data bases for tracking the participation and performance of Chapter 1 participants.

8. Publish a national newsletter on Chapter 1 program improvement and evaluation.

Because of the growing importance of evaluation and program improvement in proposed legislation and in the states, technical assistance users would probably welcome a national newsletter covering these topics. The newsletter could include stories on relevant ED activities, state initiatives, research findings, new TAC services, and features on state and

local "successes." The newsletter could be the responsibility of one of the TACs, with all the TACs urged to submit articles. Its publication would be particularly timely as SEAs and LEAs prepare to implement new Chapter 1 legislation.

Possible Changes in ED Administration of the TACs

The following suggestions are concerned with ED's management and monitoring of the TACs.

9. Implement new reporting requirements.

Chapter 5 of this report described the TACs' current reports to ED on their activities and services. We conclude that ED could streamline current reporting by focusing on (1) monthly reports of TAC expenditure of staff time and other resources across TAC activities and (2) state-by-state narrative reports of evaluation and program improvement needs, TAC services, results, and projected needs.

10. Increase feedback to the TACs on their performance.

Because of other demands, ED staff responsible for monitoring the TACs have little opportunity to review performance or to provide constructive feedback. ED might consider staff arrangements that would permit ED monitors more time to (1) read and question TAC activity reports, (2) consult with users of TAC services to assess TAC performance, and (3) provide feedback to the TACs on the strengths and weaknesses of their services. These monitoring activities would assist TACs in their self-evaluation activities. They would also help ED monitors stay informed about evaluation and program improvement issues in Chapter 1.

11. Allow TACs greater latitude in staffing.

An area in which the TACs may need a bit more slack from ED is in staffing decisions. The TACs' current contracts set out reasonable standards for TAC directors, assistant directors, and project staff, which were used to assess the qualifications of the individuals proposed to staff the current contracts. ED could allow TAC directors greater latitude in deciding whom to hire as they replace TAC staff members who leave. We find this a reasonable delegation of decisionmaking because TAC directors are in the best position to decide whether a job candidate is likely to contribute to a TAC's overall capacity for meeting the technical assistance needs of its region. The exception might be the positions of TAC director or director of a TAC field office, for which ED could continue to review proposed new hires.

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